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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 18 MAY 1991

PRENTICE DIAGNOSES AMNESIA IN PENDLE'S TORY MP

The row over the NHS opt out plans shows no signs of blowing over. Speaking at a meeting of the Barrowford Labour Party last weekend, Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, said:

"After weeks of gentle encouragement, I have yet to persuade Pendle's Conservative MP to speak out and tell people what he really thinks about the creation of a market place in health I am particularly interested in his views on the application by Burnley Health Care to take over local hospitals and health facilities. His silence perplexes me. At first, I thought it was a simple case of loss of voice. Unusual in a politician but not unheard of.

"But the symptoms now resemble amnesia. Our Tory MP has obviously forgotten the existence of the electorate. In a politician, this condition can prove fatal. My advice is he should start speaking about the NHS reforms soon. Otherwise the voters may figure he has nothing to say and prescribe their own remedy."

=ENDS=

Note to Editors

1. Photograph: Gordon Prentice and local health workers at the Arndale Centre, Nelson on 18 May. Hundreds of shoppers register their objections to the opt out proposals from Burnley Health Care Trust. Note to Photographers

2. Gordon Prentice and local health workers will be answering questions from local people about the threat to the NHS on Saturday 1 June 1991 at the market in Colne from 10am to 12 noon.

EMBARGO UNTIL THURSDAY 1 AUGUST 1991

PRENTICE ACTS TO REMEDY ROUGH JUSTICE

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, is campaigning to get the law changed to protect housebuyers who are not told the full history of the property they want to buy.

Prentice has written to Labour's top legal spokesperson in the House of Commons - John Morris QC MP - calling for the law to be tightened up to force house sellers to disclose full details to prospective buyers.

Prentice said: "Mr and Mrs Cliffe have suffered a terrible

injustice. They decided to buy a property in Barnoldswick and in all good faith lodged £1,000 as a deposit on exchange of contract. They found out quite by chance that the previous occupier had hanged herself there in August last year. Quite understandably, they decided to pull out but have had to forfeit the original £1,000 deposit plus further sums totalling about 8% of the full purchase price. All in all, they are out of pocket to the tune of £3,000. This is money they can ill afford to lose. It is rough justice and the law must be changed."

Prentice continued: "I have been in touch with the Lord Chancellor's Department who have offered tea and sympathy to Mr and Mrs Cliffe but nothing else. They say it would be next to impossible to frame a new duty on house sellers to disclose everything which may cause a purchaser to think twice about buying a particular house. Absolute rubbish but typical of the mind numbing complacency I have come to expect from this Government. I'm not asking them to do the impossible merely to do a little lateral thinking."

Prentice concluded "At present, in the standard Law Society Contract Forms, house vendors are asked to disclose "further particulars" about the property but the question is not specific enough. Vendors should be under a duty to disclose whether, to the best of their knowledge, the property had ever been used for any criminal purpose over, say, the preceeding five years and whether there were any deaths in the property which had been reported to the coroner. This simple formulation which is apparently beyond the wit of the Government to come up with ™would cover the Cliffe case with all its tragic and costly consequences."

Mrs Cliffe added: "When this happened my husband and I were totally devastated. I couldn't eat or sleep for three weeks. We are now beginning to get over it but I am determined to do what I can to protect others from falling into this kind of trap."Our savings have been wiped out. We can't afford to go on holiday this year and we can't afford to carpet the house we've now moved into. The whole thing has been an absolute nightmare."

Note to Editors

The exchange of contracts usually takes place about 10 to 14 days before completion when the parties to the sale respectively leave and occupy the property. The contract is legally binding on exchange. Mr and Mrs Cliffe now live at 42 Skipton Road, Earby. Telephone No 0282 844944.
For Immediate Release 8 October 1991

PRENTICE GIVES SEND-OFF TO MARCH FOR JOBS

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, and Burnley MP, Peter

Pike, gave the Lancashire March for Jobs a rousing send off at the Burnley Miners Social Club last Monday.

The unemployed marchers plan to arrive in Blackpool ©just before John Major's keynote speech on Friday to the Tory Party Conference.

Prentice said: "Unemployment is again at the top of the political agenda and the March for Jobs will focus attention on the plight of the unemployed. They will be marching into a town where youth unemployment (between 16 and 24) is 60% up on last year."Here in Pendle, things are dire. The jobless totals are rising every month and there are no signs that it will level out let alone fall in the near future.

Prentice slated the Government's latest scheme for the long term unemployed "Employment Action". Prentice said: "Employment inaction would have been a more appropriate term to use. They are bringing in a new scheme offering 30,000 places nationwide when unemployment here in Lancashire alone is over 50,000. It works out at about 50 places per constituency and here in Pendle we have more than 2,700 people out of work.

Prentice concluded: "The Government is spending £2.5m advertising Employment Action yet they spent £12.5m promoting the privatisation of British Telecom. That says something about the Tory priorities.

ENDS

"MASHED POTATO BRAINS" JIBE BY PRENTICE

The Conservative's Citizen's Charter which was unveiled last week by the Prime Minister has been lambasted by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice told a packed meeting of the Party's ruling General Committee in Nelson last weekend that the Tories obviously believed voters' brains were made of mashed potato. "How else can we explain the remarkable decision made by the Tories to portray themselves as the Party that gives people rights. We all know they've spent the last twelve years abolishing, denying and refusing rights."

Prentice continued: "The Tories have clearly been consulting their public relations advisers who have told them that "rights" is the new buzz word for the nineties. The problem with this strategy is that people aren't idiots and they can see behind the advertising puff."

Prentice said: "I can give details of ten rights abolished by the Tories for every one promised in their overblown Citizen's Charter. In 1979 everyone had the right to a free eye test. Now it has gone. In 1979 everyone had the right to a free dental check up. Gone. In 1979 schoolchildren had the right to a nutritious school meal. Gone. In 1979 defendants in court had the right to challenge jurors without giving reasons. No longer. "35,000 local government workers could exercise their democratic rights by standing for election to the House of Commons or to a local authority other than the one that employed them. Gone. In 1979, young people under 21 were able to have their employment rights protected by a wages council. That right has gone.

"In 1979, a woman in work had a right to be re-instated after she had a baby. Now, if she works for a small firm, that right has gone. In 1979, students had the same rights to social security benefits as other people. In 1991 they had lost their rights to housing benefit and income support"

"It is a litany of lost opportunities. Citizens' rights have been abolished or ignored for over a decade and the Tories now expect plaudits for their new Charter. They've got the cheek of the devil."
ENDS
Note to Editors

The Charter guarantees maximum waiting times for NHS treatment. In 1979 there were 695,000 people on NHS waiting lists. In 1990 this had swollen to 957,000.The Charter promises "better railways". In 1979 the Government's Public Sector Obligation Grant to British Rail was £1,098m. By 1990/1 this had collapsed to £474m. Over the past eleven years, over £3 billion in Government subsidy has been withdrawn from the railways.

LEE ON NHS REFORMS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 17 MAY 1991
LETTER FOR PUBLICATION

Dear Sir

Your readers will know that I have been trying to flush from our Conservative MP his views on the NHS reforms. At the very least, I expected an acknowledgement that all was not well in the new Trust hospitals and that public concerns needed to be addressed.

However, nothing prepared me for the lofty and disdainful comment carried in the Leader last week. You quote Mr Lee as saying "In the fullness of time I will make my position on the health service and hospital trust status well known." Quite frankly, this is not good enough. Mr Lee says he will ignore me for the pathetically juvenille reason that he does not want to give me publicity. But what about the people of Pendle? Won't he tell them his views? Or will he wait until he judges it safe to express tentatively of course © an opinion on the matter?

In fact, your story reveals that you contacted Mr Lee on Wednesday of last week for a comment on my letter. He chose to say nothing to you and your readers. Yet 24 hours before, he was voting in the House of Commons to support the establishment of Trust hospitals and a two tier health service.

How grotesque it is that our Tory MP chooses to say nothing when, in the very same edition of your paper, the NW Regional Health Authority is inviting the public to comment on the possibility of our local hospitals and health facilities being taken over by

a Trust. Readers who wish to register an objection to the Trust application should write to Bruce Martin, Chairman, North West Regional Health Authority, Gateway House, Piccadilly South, Manchester M60 7LP.

Yours sincerely
Gordon Prentice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 5 May 1991

LABOUR ON COURSE FOR GENERAL ELECTION WIN says Prentice

Last week's local election results in Pendle offer hard evidence that Labour is on its way to a General Election victory according to the Party's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

Analysis of the results show a collapse in Conservative votes and a weak performance from the Liberal Democrats."Labour now has overall control of the Council for the first time since local government reorganisation taking three seats off the Liberal Democrats and one from an independent. That is impressive but we need to look behind the figures to examine the long term trends" said Prentice.

"The seats that came up for election this year were last contested in 1987 just before the General Election. Since then, Labour's vote has improved dramatically. There has been a swing to Labour from the Tories of 8% and a swing to Labour from the Liberal Democrats of 10%

Prentice continued: "We are in the curious position of having a Tory MP and the barest handful of Tory councillors.Our Tory MP must be praying for the Liberal Democrat vote to hold up at the next General Election. It is the only way he can possibly get back in. Voting Liberal Democrat in Pendle is a risky business. You might get saddled with a Tory MP the majority of people don't want."

Note to Editors

The table below gives the percentage change in the vote between 1987 and 1991.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 18 MAY 1991

PRENTICE "APPALLED" BY ROLLS ROYCE DECISION

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle has slammed the decision by Rolls Royce to sack its total workforce and offer re©engagement on new employment contracts.

The decision which Prentice described as indefensible came in the same week as RR unveiled plans to double job losses in the areospace division this year to 6,000. In Barnoldswick 250 jobs are under threat.

"The law does not allow employers to vary unilaterally an employee's contract. At least that was the position as most people understood it © until last week. If the RR decision is allowed to stand, people will have next to no protection in law against rogue employers.

"Rolls Royce is a victim of Tory economic policies and faces difficulties along with the rest of British industry. But that doesn't give it carte blanche to rip up the employment contracts of its workers" said Prentice.

=ENDS=

IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 5 AUGUST 1991 LETTER FOR PUBLICATION

PENDLE INDUSTRY "BLITZED BY RECESSION" SAYS PRENTICE

The roll call of closures and redundancies in last week's Nelson Leader made depressing reading. Last Friday, as you went to Press, another batch of job losses was announced 25 employees at Dawes and Company's Manor Mill at Nelson.

Notice of redundancies has been given to 206 people at C. V. Woven Fabrics at Barrowford. They are currently working out the 90 day consultation period. At Smith and Nephew's Brierfield site, 120 people are on short time working.

Our textile industry is on the ropes and precious little is being done by the Government to save it. Textiles used to be the manufacturing mainstay of the area but now it is a ghost of its former self.

The Labour Party believes in manufacturing industry. Britain cannot sustain itself in the future on service industries alone. We need to make goods as well as provide services. That is why I shall be launching later this month "Pendle's Drive for Jobs" the Labour Party's campaign for employment and economic growth. I shall be meeting local business people, trade unionists and other interest groups who have the long term interests of Pendle at heart. I shall be joined by leading members of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Trade and Industry team. The Labour Party is determined to arrest the catastrophic decline in manufacturing jobs in this area.

Yours etc

Gordon Prentice

Lee on Exports.

The Editor Nelson Leader37 Scotland Road, Nelson, LancDear Editor

Our Tory MP is delighted at the growth in UK exports and says it shows Britain's manufacturing industry "is very much alive" (Leader 27 September 1991). Where has he been over the past 13 years? On another planet perhaps?

If he wants an accurate guide to the state of the economy he should look at the volume of imports as well as exports and at manufacturing output. As soon as the current recession eases, we will see a growth in the volume of imports as people start buying from overseas the things we used to make here but no longer do. The Conservatives have been responsible for a collapse in our manufacturing base. The evidence is all around us. It took until 1988 for manufacturing output to recover to the level it was in 1979.

Since 1979, the growth in manufacturing output has been lower than all other developed countries (OECD) except Greece.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE : 29 JULY 1991

"ADMIT YOU WERE WRONG" TAUNT BY PRENTICE

Pendle's Tory MP has been challenged by his Labour opposite number, Gordon Prentice, to admit he was wrong in supporting plans by local hospitals to opt out of local health authority control.

Prentice said: "In mid June, I finally forced Pendle's Tory MP to come of the fence on the question of NHS opt outs. He backed the proposed trusts without qualification even going to the extent of saying that competition and market forces were needed in health."

"Since then, we have had the result of the local health workers' ballot with 1,577 voting for against the trust proposal and a derisory 32 voting for. And in a separate ballot 80% of the consultants voted against the trust.

Prentice continued: "The nail in the coffin must surely be the House of Commons Health Committee which reported last week. The

Tories tried to suppress 17 pages which were highly critical of the trust hospitals which our MP so fervently admires. No©one wants these trusts. Not the doctors. Not the nurses. Not the patients. Not the health workers. Not the public."

"I don't know what it takes for our Tory MP to say sorry. A shot of vallium in combination with an approaching General Election will probably do the trick. He apologised belatedly for the Poll Tax so a second public apology may be too much to expect. He may think this is one humiliation too many."

Note to editors (see over)‘
NOTE TO EDITORSThe Commons Report reveals that applications for trust status from the 57 "first wave" hospitals were scrutinized by a tiny 12 person team in London which included only one accountant.Burnley Pendle and Rossendale are in the "second wave" and are applying for trust status from next April.Labour is committed to taking all opted out hospitals back into the National Health Service on taking office after the General Election.

12 February 1991

NEW HOTLINE FOR PENDLE

A new telephone Hotline service offering help and advice on local issues has been launched by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

Callers dialing the Hotline number 695471 will immediately get their query logged with the promise of a guaranteed follow up by Gordon and his Labour Advice Team.

"We don't promise we can solve every problem but we do our best to help - even if it just means pointing people in the right direction" said Gordon.

He continued "Over the past few months I've dealt with an avalanche of complaints about issues that are really concerning people such as the Poll Tax and the threat to the NHS. I already have a mobile advice team touring the constituency with me - meeting people on their doorsteps - and this is just part of the service".

-ENDS-

For immediate release
March 1991

LABOUR CHALLENGES GOVERNMENT TO INCREASE CHILD BENEFIT IN BUDGET

Michael Meacher MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, together with the Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, today challenged the Tory MP John Lee to stand up for all children in Pendle. Labour is pressing the Government to uprate child benefit in the budget to its 1987 level for every child in the area.

Lee was one of the 294 Tory MPs who failed to support an opposition amendment to the Social Security Bill in March 1989 which would have resulted in Child Benefit being linked to inflation. A two child family in Pendle would have been £3.60 a week better off this April.

Pendle's Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, said: "The Budget in March is an ideal opportunity for the Chancellor to increase Child Benefit for every child in Pendle. It has not gone up since 1987. Its real value has been cut by £1.30 a week for the first child and £2.30 a week for all other children. For a two child family in Pendle this represents a loss of £187 a year."

"The Government has said that Child Benefit will be increased in April 1991 by £1 a week - but for the first child only. This means that only around half of all children in Pendle will get an increase this year.

"The Tory manifesto in 1987 promised "Child Benefit will continue to be paid as now and direct to the mother" . Four months later it was frozen. If Child Benefit had been fully uprated since April 1987 it would be worth £9.55 a week in April 1991. Instead it will be worth £8.25 for the first child and will remain at £7.25 for all other children.

Speaking in support of the Pendle Child Benefit Campaign, Michael Meacher MP said:

"Every child deserves a good start in life and Child Benefit is the best way of helping families with children. Almost 7 million families with 12 million children get Child Benefit every week. Labour believes it should continue as a universal benefit because it works. It has a 100% take up rate because it is not means tested. If universal benefit goes Britain will be the only country in the developed world which makes no general allowance for the cost of raising children.

"Labour will increase Child Benefit in the first year of a Labour Government - at least to make up the loss in value since the 1987 election.

Ends

Note to Editors.

John Lee MP has consistently voted against Child Benefit. He voted with the Government on the

* Social Security Bill - Report Stage. Amendment to link Child Benefit to inflation. (12 January 1988)

* Social Security Bill - Report Stage. Amendment to link Child Benefit to inflation (24 March 1989)

* Social Security Bill. Amendment to require the annual uprating of Child Benefit (19 July 1989)

TORY MP'S HOLIDAY FIRM CUTS JOBS 24 FEB 91 (4/91)

Country Holidays - the firm headed by Pendle's Tory MP John Lee is the latest casualty of the deep recession now gripping the country. Last week they announced 90 job losses only days after Lee claimed in the local press that "1991 could be a year of considerable opportunity for tourism".

Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate for Pendle said:
"I feel great sympathy for the 90 employees. One minute they were led to believe their jobs were secure with a tourist boom in prospect. The next minute they find themselves out on the street.

The announcement came in the very same week as the Nelson Leader carried a four page supplement featuring Lee proclaiming the resillience of local industry. The irony will not be lost on the people of Pendle.

The only thing the Tories can successfully manufacture is a deep recession" said Prentice.

Note to Editors

Part time Tory MP, John Lee, became chairman of County Holidays in September 1989 after resigning as Minister for Tourism in July 1989. He has extensive business interests.

For Immediate Release 26 March 1991

Prentice re-issues challenge to Lee for public debate on the poll tax (5/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice has re-issued his challenge to Tory MP John Lee for a public debate on the alternative to the Poll Tax. "Last December Lee turned down an invitation to debate the issues on the grounds that it would give me too much publicity!" said Prentice.

Prentice said: "The situation is now too serious for Lee to takle refuge in these parlour game niceties. The Government is all over the shop and peiople want to know where their MP stands. So far he has gone through four stages from ardent poll tax supporter to self proclaimed poll tax dragon slayer. But I want to know what his latest position is - if he has one."

Prentice continued: "The four stages are easy enough to chart.

1987 was stage one. Then Lee was champion of the Poll Tax. In a leaflet issued during the 1987 General Election campaign, Lee had this to say: "Figures (on the Poll Tax) put forward so far by other parties are pure fantasy. The actual charge will be up to the Council not the Government. In any case there will be generous rebates and supplementary benefits to help. The Conservatives new community Charge will spread the burden more fairly with lower rates for many."

1987 - 1990 stage two. Lee is a loyal supporter of the Poll Tax. He voted down the line with the Government on every vote in Parliament. All his votes are on the public record in Hansard.

December 1990. stage three. Panic and confusion. In a debate in the Commons on 5 December, Lee argued for a return to the old style rating system adjusted to take accouint of numbers in a household or earnings "together with, possibly, a national uniform charge payable by non ratepayers so that everyone would make a contribution" (Hansard 5 December 1990)

1991. "We're terribly sorry" stage.

ENDS

For Immediate Release: 9 April 1991

GIVE THE HEALTH WORKERS A SAY says Prentice (6/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has called for a ballot of all health service staff as part of the "consultation" on whether local health facilities should opt out of the NHS.

The Burnley Pendle and Rossendale District Health Authority is putting the finishing touches to its application to opt out of the NHS. Its consultation paper which is to be published shortly will be available for public comment from May - July this year with a decision expected in September by the Secretary of State for Health. If he gives the go ahead all medical facilities in Pendle other than GPs surgeries will be taken out of the NHS.

Prentice has written to DHA Chairman James Rawson urging the DHA to ballot staff on whether they agree with the proposal to opt out. "It is as plain as a pikestaff that the vast majority of people want to keep the health service in one piece. And yet there is undoubtedly foot dragging by the DHA on whether to seek the views of everyone working for the health service. The consultants - who organised their own ballot - have already rejected the opt out plan. But what about the doctors, nurses and ancillary workers? There are about 4,000 people employed by the DHA and their views should be canvassed in a properly organised and scrutinised ballot."

Prentice continued ; "Last month all NHS staff received an unsolicited letter with their wage slips from Duncan Nichol - the Chief Executive of the NHS - arguing the case for what he calls the "new style" NHS. If this kind of junk mail can be circulated to staff then why not a ballot paper? asked Prentice.

BUDGET CON (7/91)

"Most people in Pendle will still be paying more in Poll tax after yesterday's Budget than they ever paid in rates" claimed Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at a meeting of the Pendle Trades Council last night, Prentice said The Budget was an exercise in crude political expediency. "The Tories are heaving the poll tax overboard in a desperate attempt to win an early General Election, but their motives are so transparently obvious no-one in Pendle will be fooled".

Prentice continued: "Pendle's Tory MP has called for a public holiday with street parties and celebrations. (the rest is on hard copy)

For immediate release 26 March 1991

'TWIN TAX TORTURE' SAYS PRENTICE (8/91)

The Government's proposed replacement of the Poll Tax has been described as "twin tax torture" by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

"The new .i.Property Poll Tax; is the worst of both worlds. "There will be a property tax on homes combined with a second tax on every adult in each household. Apart from these basic outlines, the rest is shrouded in mystery. There are no details".

Prentice continued: "It's time for the Tories - and Pendle's Tory MP - to come clean and start giving answers to some simple questions.

When will the new tax come into effect?

What will the valuation basis be for the property based element of the tax?

What exactly does the Government mean by a "household"?

What will the size of the Poll Tax element be in the new twin tax?

What services will it pay for?

Will there be a special register (like the Poll Tax register) or will the electoral register be used?

How many losers will there be?

Will the 20% rule be abolished for students, the unemployed and those on income support?

"Until we get some answers to these straightforward questions people will rightly believe that the Tories are planning a "Son of Poll Tax".

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 20 April 1991

LOCAL INCOME TAX FIGURES COMPLETELY BOGUS says Prentice (9/91)

On 15 April the Liberal Democrats published their .i.Local Income Tax ;figures for every local authority in England. In Pendle the LIT rate was the joint highest (with Rossendale) of all the 14 Lancashire districts at 3.6p in the £. Despite this, here in Pendle - in a campaign of breathtaking mendacity - the Liberal Democrats have been claiming a local LIT rate of 2.7p. The difference between these two figures amounts to £60.35p for someone on £10,000 a year! Who do we believe? Paddy Ashdown or the local Albert Einsteins who make 2 + 2 = 5.

In one sense the discrepancy is academic as no-one seriously believes there will be a Liberal Democrat Government after the next General Election. This encourages the Liberal Democrats to say things in the belief that nobody will bother to subject their claims to detailed scrutiny. But lets look at their figures and at their methodology to see how they add up.

A married couple on £12,000 with a non working wife would pay £251.61p in LIT. A single person on the same salary would pay £313.38p. Their proposals will bear heavily on middle income households with more than one wage earner.

Readers can work out their own LIT liability by taking their gross wage and deducting their allowances (£3295 for a single person and £5015 for a married couple) to arrive at their taxable pay. Then take 3.6% of this to get the LIT liability. The result of this simple arithmetic will dispel any notion that the vast majority of Pendle people will be better off under LIT than with Labour's Fair Rates (£185 for an average household).

Under the Liberal Democrat proposals the LIT levied by a local authority will be largely determined by the amount of grant it receives from central government. Local Government spending will be financed by non domestic rate revenue and a new equalisation grant - the remainder will be raised from LIT.

The Liberal Democrats claim their equalisation grant is fair because it matches needs with resources. However, their figures don't stack up. For example on the resources side their proposals "take account of" taxable income in each local authority district.. Despite the apparent sophistication of a calculation running to three decimal places (5.006% they say) the figures are completely bogus. There are no official published figures giving taxable income broken down to district level.

They also intend to use rateable values as a measure of a local authority's resources. Property values will therefore indirectly influence the level of LIT. On the needs side of the equation, each council will get a flat rate £205.56p per head. This common amount would apply across the country - from Pendle to Putney alike - taking no account of vastly different needs. For precision, the Liberal Democrats rely on the totally discredited Conservative Standard Spending Assessments which few people seriously believe accurately reflect the needs of an area. This benchmark already gives places like Wandsworth in London a higher needs rating than Northern industrial towns.

The Liberal Democrats Local Income Tax proposal is a real Heath Robinson affair. A bit like the Party that promotes it in such a discreditable and mendacious way.

For Immediate Release 27 April 1991

YOU CAN'T TRUST THE TRUSTS says Prentice (10/91)

A Letter from the Chief Executive of the NHS, Duncan Nichol - circulated last month to all 970,000 employees of the NHS in England - has fuelled the controversy over the Burnley Pendle and Rossendale District Health Authority proposal to opt out of the NHS. The DHA has said there will be a consultation with "interested parties" from May to July 91 with a final decision in September by the Health Secretary.

Nichol's letter refers to the creation of a "new style NHS" with the reforms "improving the quality and quantity of services for patients". Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has slammed the letter as an insult to people's intelligence.

Speaking last Saturday - at a public meeting organised by the Pendle Trades Council - Prentice said: "This junk mail cost the NHS £127,000 to print and distribute and now a few weeks later his former deputy (Peter Griffiths, ex deputy chief executive of the NHS) wearing a new hat as Chairman of Guy's Hospital Trust is announcing 600 job losses and £6m cuts. The decision last week by the Bradford Hospital Trust to make savage cuts is a sure sign of how things are going to develop if this "new style NHS" is allowed to develop.

Prentice continued: "Burnley Pendle and Rossendale DHA should immediately drop its plans to opt out of the NHS. They can't convince the public a two tier NHS is needed and they are frightened to consult their staff in a properly organised and independently scrutinised ballot."

Prentice wrote to .i.James Rawson; - Chairman of the District Health Authority - at the beginning of April asking for a ballot of all 4,000 staff. "The reply was pathetically inadequate" said Prentice. "I was told it was not a matter for the DHA even although it is working up the opt out plans, but was something for the Regional Health Authority. This kind of "pass the parcel" is simply not good enough. I have now written to the Region demanding details of their proposed consultation - and for an assurance that they will be guided by the results."

Prentice said"Many people must now believe the consultation will be a sham,. We've got top make sure it isn't. The Burnley Pendle and Rossendale DHA has been painting a rosy picture of life outside the NHS. But who on earth will believe them now? Hospital trusts are the first step along the road to as market place in health. Those who can afford top class health care will get it. Those who can't will wait... and wait. And for those people with chronic illnesses the outlook for them is bleak indeed.

Ends

Note to Editors

Enclosed letter from Nichol to all NHS staff and Hansard written question.
Press release dated 9 April 1991 from Pendle Labour Party (for Background)
Letter to James Rawson together with reply.

PRESS RELEASE DATE Friday 2 November 1990 (1/90)

From: GORDON PRENTICE, LABOUR'S PROSPECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE FOR PENDLE

The Labour Party's ruling National Executive Committee has given strong backing to Pendle's decision to choose Gordon Prentice as their Prospective Parliamentary Candidate.

At their meeting last week, the NEC endorsed Gordon's selection by the local Labour Party and wished him well in the campaign to come. Gordon intends to spend every moment of his time betwen now and the General Election getting to know even better every corner of the constituency and its people.

Gordon said "I shall be paying very close attention to John Lee's activities in Parliament and publicising his voting record on important issues. For the past three years he voted to freeze Child Benefit so I don't want to hear any lectures from him about the Conservatives being the Party of the family!"

Gordon, 39, works for the Labour Party at its national headquarters developing policy on a range of issues such as regional government and Labour's alternative to the Poll Tax. His immediate priorities will be the health service, education and training and - of course -the Poll Tax. Gordon is married to Bridget who is Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Lewisham East.

Labour Leader, Neil Kinnock, said Pendle's choice was a good one. "The Labour Party needs people of the calibre of Gordon Prentice in the House of Commons - determined to change Britain for the better and determined to fight for the interests of the people of Pendle."

CONTACT NUMBER: 081 748 1428

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 9 May 1991

PRENTICE CHALLENGES TORY MP TO SPEAK OUT ON HEALTH REFORMS (11/91)

Pendle's Tory MP has been challenged by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, to come clean on the NHS.

Prentice has written an open letter to Tory MP John Lee setting out a series of questions on Lee's attitude towards the creation of a market place in health.

"This issue is of enormous national and local concern and the silence from John Lee is deafening" said Prentice.

"He doesn't live on another planet so he must be aware of the tremendous concern about the future of the NHS. John Lee must believe the people of Pendle have zips up the back of their heads. People want to know what their

MP thinks about this key issue. Does he have a view? And, if so, why won't he speak out?"
ends

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MONDAY 17 JUNE 1991

"EXTORTIONATE" BEER PRICES CONDEMNED BY PRENTICE (12/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has slammed the threatened increase in .i.beer prices; which was revealed by The Pendle Citizen last week. The Citizen reported that pub landlords in Burnley and Pendle had warned that drinkers could face a 50p a pint increase - taking the price of a pint close to £2.

Prentice said: "Over the past few years the brewers have been wringing every penny of profit they can get from hard pressed beer drinkers. It's time we put them over a barrel and insist they justify these enormous price hikes."

Prentice continued: "The brewing industry seems to be a law unto itself.
The price rises in the 1980s have been staggering. Retail prices increased by 142% from March 1979 to March 1991. Beer prices rose by 222% over the same period. That increase cannot be blamed on tax - total tax as a percentage of price was 40.4% in 1981 but only 33.4% after the 1991 budget. People who enjoy a pint at their local are being comprehensively ripped off."
ENDS
Note to Editors

The next Labour Government will review the brewing industry. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) reported in 1989 on "The Supply of Beer" but nothing in the way of effective action has been taken. The brewing industry is being carved up between giant retailing chains and large brewers. Before the MMC reported, the four largest brewers accounted for 58% of the market. The top four now account for nearly 70%

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 17 JUNE 1991

PRENTICE SLAMS OPT OUT MP (13/91)
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 17 JUNE 1991

LABOUR MEANS BUSINESS SAYS PRENTICE (14/91)
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 7 JUNE 1991

NEW STUDY PREDICTS LABOUR MP FOR PENDLE (15/91)

A new survey of marginal constituencies predicts Labour will win Pendle at the next General Election. "Can the Tories Lose?" which was published last month puts Pendle in the "easier win" category where Labour is likely to achieve an above average swing in its favour.

The Conservatives hold the seat with a slender 2,639 majority and will lose the constituency on any swing greater than 2.6%. Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate said:

"This new publication confirms what most people already know. Tory support here in Pendle is about as common as snow in August. It has vanished. The swing to Labour at the local elections last month was over 10%. And nationally, Labour has moved into an eight point lead over the Tories."

"The Tories are trying to talk up their support but people have simply stopped believing them. We are witnessing a sea change in the public mood" said Prentice.
Note to editors

1. Extract overleaf from "Can the Tories Lose?" published by Lawrence and Wishart, May 1991.

2. The latest Gallup Poll in the Daily Telegraph (7 June 1991) puts Labour on 41.5% and the Tories on 33.5%
For immediate release 3 June 1991

SHORT TEMPERS MAKE BAD LOSERS says Prentice (16/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, has called on the local Liberal Democrats to count to ten before they speak in the Council Chamber.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 3 JUNE 1991

TORY MP HAS BRASS NECK, THICK SKIN AND NO SOLUTIONS SAYS PRENTICE (17/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, has launched a blistering attack on Pendle's Conservative MP who is accused of having nothing worthwhile to say on the problems of unemployment.

For immediate release 3 June 1991

REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY TURNS DOWN BALLOT CALL (18/91)

The North West Regional Health Authority has given the thumbs down to calls for a ballot of health workers on plans to take local hospitals out of health authority control.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 24 JUNE 1991

POSTERS RIDICULED BY LABOUR (19/91)

The Conservatives controversial £1 million poster campaign "Labour Going for Broke" will go down like a lead balloon according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

His prediction follows sightings of the posters on Nelson billboards last week. Prentice said: "This crude propaganda which is designed to scare the voters is more likely to make them laugh - with incredulity!"

Prentice told a meeting of pensioners in Colne's Waterside Ward last weekend that the Tories are trying to make the voters forget the horrors of the Thatcher years. "The Tories are air brushing the history books - pretending that mean, nasty policies - like freezing child benefit - never happened. Conservative Central Office has obviously been taking lessons from Pendle's Tory MP who has spent the last 18 months assiduously re-writing history. Anyone listening to him would think he got rid of the Poll Tax single handed and that he never voted for it in the first place!"

Prentice concluded "The posters are going to be totally counter productive. The Tories have heaped mortgage misery on millions, hiked up VAT to 17.5% and wasted over £10 billion on the Poll Tax experiment - and they point an accusing finger at the Labour Party as if we are in some way responsible!."

ENDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 24 JUNE 1991

HELP ON HAND IN WATERSIDE (20/91)

Waterside residents were spoiled for choice last Saturday when they turned up for the Labour Party's advice surgery at the Holy Trinity Parish Hall in Tatton Street.

Ward councillors Tony Pickles and Nicola Robinson were joined by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice. The team offered the full range of expert advice.

Prentice said: "We deal with a thousand and one queries in the course of an average month. We don't promise we can solve every problem but we do our very best."

Note to Editors.

Prentice, who was campaigning in Barnoldswick afterwards, dropped into the Barnoldswick Labour Party's Jumble Sale and Social at the Weaver's Rooms in Frank Street.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 25 JUNE 1991 LETTER FOR PUBLICATION

Dear Sir

LABOUR'S PROPOSALS FOR A MINIMUM WAGE (21/91)

Pendle is a low wage area that will benefit from Labour's proposal to introduce a minimum wage starting at around £3.40p an hour (which is 50% of median men's earnings). It really sticks in my throat that so many of those criticizing the policy have comfortable life styles with incomes many times greater than the £7,000 we propose.

Our own Tory MP, besides his Parliamentary salary, has a multiplicity of directorships and business interests. Yet, predictably, he is implacably opposed to a minimum wage on the grounds that it would cost jobs. And this is from a Government that has presided over spiralling unemployment - rising again last month by 70,600, the largest May rise on record. Our Conservative MP has also voted in the past to abolish many of the Wages Councils which have traditionally provided some measure of protection for the very low paid.

The whole debate on the minimum wage is coloured by the hypocrisy of so many of the participants. How on earth can the 62 Tory MPs who are members of Lloyds of London (where the average unearned profit per year for a syndicate member is £26,613) keep a straight face while chiding the rest of us that a minimum hourly rate of £3.40 is going to smash the economy?
The Tories have their own ideological reasons for opposing a minimum wage but the hostility of the Liberal Democrats - with their self proclaimed European orientation - is less easy to understand. I put this down to ignorance. A statutory minimum wage exists in Spain, Portugal, France, Holland and Luxembourg. Collective agreements determine pay through national level negotiations in Belgium and Greece and by industry level agreements in Italy, Denmark and Germany. Britain has the worst protection against the exploitation of the low paid in the European Community.

ENDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 24 JUNE 1991

PRENTICE HITS THE ROOF OVER TORY HOUSING POLICY

Over one third of young families in Pendle can't afford to buy their own home according to a new study published this month by Bristol University.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, welcomed the survey "Bridging the Affordability Gap" which looks at the housing problems facing newly formed households. Prentice said 33.9% of Pendle's young people under 30 setting up home for the first time could not afford to buy. Only in 11 out of 37 local authority districts in the North West were young people in a worse position.

Prentice said: "There is a housing crisis in Britain and the Government is doing precious little to help struggling young families. We need lower mortgage rates over a sustained period to bring owner occupation within reach of young couples. And we need a vigorous programme of house building for rent to cater for the needs of those who cannot or do not wish to buy. The Government has hamstrung Councils - including our own here in Pendle - who are just not allowed to build new homes in the quantity required."

Note to Editors.

The report says that despite the recent fall in the price of owner occupied housing there is a need for at least 75,000 new homes a year just to meet the needs of newly formed households under 30.

Last year local authorities and housing assocations provided fewer than 20,000 new homes in total. Government policy determines the level of council housebuilding nationwide

For immediate release: 1 July 1991

PRENTICE POURS SCORN ON TORY INCOMPETENCE (23/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has poured scorn on Tory claims to be the Party of competence and good management.

Prentice told a meeting of local trade unionists in Earby last week that 13 years of Tory government had cost the nation a fortune. Prentice catalogued instances of Conservative mismanagement in Education, Health, Privatisation and the Poll Tax.

"It is a roll call of bungling and ineptitude worthy of a Carry On film. But in reality there is very little to laugh about. The closures and redundancies hitting this area are a terrible tragedy."

ends
Note to Editors

Background note on how the Tories waste taxpayers money.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 5 AUGUST 1991

PENDLE INDUSTRY 'BLITZED BY RECESSION' SAYS PRENTICE (24/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, is launching a new "Drive for Jobs" in recession hit Pendle. Prentice told a meeting of local trade unionists in Nelson last weekend that the recession was taking an unsustainable toll on local industry.

Prentice said: "The roll call of closures and redundancies highlighted in last week's Nelson Leader made depressing reading. As the paper went to press last Friday, yet another batch of job losses was announced - 25 employees at Dawes and Company's Manor Mill at Nelson."

"Notice of redundancies has been given to 206 people at CV Woven Fabrics at Barrowford who are currently working out the 90 day consultation. At Smith and Nephew's Brierfield site, 120 people are on short time working. Our textiles industry is on the ropes and precious little is being done by the Government to help it."

Prentice called for a new approach - one that would build on Pendle's traditional skills. "The Labour Party believes in manufacturing industry. We can't have Britain's adult population simply selling insurance policies and country holidays to one another. We need to make goods as well as sell services" he said.

Later this month, Prentice will be launching Pendle's Drive for Jobs - the Labour Party's campaign for employment. He will joined by leading members

of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Trade and Industry Team in a series of meetings planned with local business people and trade unionists.

ENDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 5 AUGUST 1991

PRENTICE IS CLAIRVOYANT - OFFICIAL (25/91)

A crystal ball could be part of the stock in trade of Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

Last month, Prentice predicted that the Directors of the newly privatised North West electricity company NORWEB would award themselves colossal salary increases on the backs of the 26% increase in profits. He told the Nelson Leader on 1 July that the Directors' salary increases would be justified on the grounds of "greater productivity". He added perceptively "You don't need to be Gypsy Rose Lee to see that one on the horizon".
News just in confirms Prentice's prediction. The Chairman of NORWEB has been awarded an increase of 165% - taking his salary from £62,270 to £165,000 a year. This works out at an increase of £3,173 per week.

When the Nelson Leader contacted Prentice this week he was modestly disclaiming second sight. "I spend a lot of time studying the hypocrisy of the Tories and the "captains" of our newly privatised industries. So you could say I can see them coming."

ENDS

For Immediate Release: 12 August 1991

PRENTICE BIDS TO FREE LOCAL MAN (26/91)

A local man imprisoned for over 20 years for a crime he says he did not commit is being backed by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice has the support of Labour's Deputy Leader, Roy Hattersley MP, who has written to the Home Office in a bid to get the case re-opened.

"The case of Anthony Alexandrowicz from Nelson - which was highlighted in a recent Granada TV documentary - is lying forgotten in a Home Office file" says Prentice. "He was recommended for parole three years ago but was turned down without a word of explanation."

Prentice added: "Anthony Alexandrowicz is a victim of the system. Even if he had been guilty of the crime of which he was convicted - 20 years in prison is altogether too high a price to pay. He is in prison still because he has no-one to speak out for him. Two simple questions need to be answered. Why did the Home Secretary overrule the recommendation of the Parole Board in 1988? And does the Home Secretary still believe that any useful purpose would be served by keeping Alexandrowicz in prison one moment longer?"

ENDS

Note to Editors

Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in prison for twenty years for a crime which, he maintains, he did not commit. Alexandrowicz was born in Nelson in Lancashire. He had a difficult home life and he was taken into care at the age of 12 because of violence in the family. After he left Approved School he became a small time burglar. When he was 17, he allegedly broke into a house in Preston and stabbed the woman living there in the breast and stomach. Apparently, she left the hospital the same day as she was admitted.

At the police station he made a confession - which he now says was made under duress. To this day, he maintains he is innocent. At the time, the psychiatric reports labelled him as someone prone to depression. However, he was not sent to a place where his condition could be treated but to an ordinary prison. He was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for wounding and aggravated burglary. He ended up in Parkhurst as a Category A prisoner. The experience brutalised him and he had a number of run ins with the prison authorities.
In 1988, three prison governors and two psychiatrists recommended to the Parole Board that he should be released. The Parole Board agreed and, in turn, reported to the Home Secretary who turned down the recommendation. The medical evidence confirmed that he was no danger to society.

The Granada TV programme advances one - very far fetched - theory in an attempt to explain the Home Office decision. Alexandrowicz is of Russian extraction. Although he knew his father had served with the Red Army he (Alexandrowicz) knew nothing of his grandparents. When Alexandrowicz was 16 he went to the Soviet Embassy to ask if they could help trace his long lost grandparents. When he was 21, Alexandrowicz applied for Soviet citizenship. The TV programme suggests that this found its way into Home Office files and prejudiced his chance of release from prison.

With all hope gone, he decided to escape from the open prison he was in. He contacted the TV people; gave them his story and then turned himself in. He is now back in prison with no date set for his possible release.

Ms Maggie Aikman (27/91)

Unit Chief Executive
Burnley General Hospital
Casterton Avenue
Burnley BB12 2PQ
8 August 1991

Dear .i.Ms Aikman

I see from today's Independent (8 August) that plans to seek trust status for hospitals in the East Cumbria Health Authority have been shelved following a 5:1 vote against by consultants in Carlisle. (see over)

Your counterpart - the acute hospital unit general manager - has apparently decided not to express an interest in trust status because of "insufficient support for the proposal". In view of the results of the ballot of hospital staff

in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale in late July and the separate one by hospital consultants would you not agree that there is insufficient support for you to press ahead with the Burnley Health care application for trust status?

Alternatively, you may feel that the level of support or otherwise - from the public and from health staff - is immaterial and that the application should go forward regardless and be considered on other factors. If this is your view, I think you owe it to yourself and to the general public to make this explicitly clear. It would end the pretence of the Trust applicants listening to views it had already discounted.

This is a matter of great public concern and I am copying this letter to the Press. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice

For Immediate Release: 10 August 1991

NHS "OPT OUT" CHIEFS WARNED TO THINK AGAIN (28/91)

Burnley Health Care - the organisation bidding to take local hospitals out of .i.health; authority control - should drop their proposals because they have no support says Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice has written to Maggie Aikman, Burnley Health Care's General Manager and architect of the opt out plan, asking her to spell out the level of support among the public and medical staff that would persuade her to drop the opt out proposal.

In his letter, Prentice said: "In view of the results of the ballot of hospital staff in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale in late July and the separate one by hospital consultants would you not agree that there is insufficient support for you to press ahead with the Burnley Health care application for trust status?

Prentice continued: "Alternatively, you may feel that the level of support or otherwise - from the public and from health staff - is immaterial and that the application should go forward regardless and be considered on other factors. If this is your view, I think you owe it to yourself and to the general public to make this explicitly clear. It would end the pretence of the Trust applicants listening to views it had already discounted."

Prentice later told the (insert press title) "What on earth is the point of public consultation if no-one listens to what is said by the public. The whole thing is a complete charade."

ENDS

For immediate release: 12 August 1991

GORDON PRENTICE TO MEET GORDON PRENTICE (29/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice is to meet his 63 year old namesake.

Gordon Prentice from Cheshire recently wrote to Gordon Prentice to find out whether there was any family connection. "It is an unusual name" said Prentice "and I decided to write to Gordon as I see his name in the newspapers from time to time and I thought we might be related."

Pendle's Prentice said "He is the only other Gordon Prentice I am aware of and I'm pretty sure there is no family connection. I haven't the faintest idea what we might say when we meet. "Gordon Prentice, I presume?"

ENDS

For immediate release 3 September 1991

NORWEB 'GRAVY TRAIN' SLAMMED BY PRENTICE (30/91)

Labour's PPC for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has challenged Kenneth Harvey the chairman of the North West's recently privatised electricity company - Norweb - to list the pay and perks he has awarded himself this year.

This latest challenge by Prentice follows the publication of Norweb's annual report and accounts which show a massiove increase in Directors' salaries.

Prentice said: "Some people have got a nice pay off from the privatisation of Norweb. Payments to the board of directors are up 112 per cent. They have also granted themselves share options - so they can buy shares in a few years time at far below their market price. This perk is worth even more than their pay increases. And that is saying a lot when the Chairman is being paid £3,200 a week.

"The shareholders have seen the share price shoot up from 100p to 216p. Most of the shares are owned by large institutions with no particular conmnection with Norweb's area.

"The City of London has done well out of privatisation because Norweb apid out £9.2m on the process of privatisation - most of it to City advisers.

"So there have been some winners. But there have also been many more losers. The taxpayer lost out because the company was sold at a third of its proper price. Above all, Norweb's customers have lost - paying 10.5% price increasers - way above the rate of inflation.

ends

Note to Editors

1. Share Options granted to Norweb Directors

Director	share options
K.G.Harvey	108,080
B> Benson	46,430
M.G.Falkener	56,633
A.Simmons	54,662
B>J> Wilson	54,662

They can exercise their right to buy shares under the Executive Share Option Scheme for £3.11 between February 1994 and February 2001. The Mail on Sunday estimated that this represented a profit to date of £51,198 for Kenneth Harvey. Their estimate of the long term value of his share options is £333,448.

2. The annual meeting of Norweb will be held in Manchester on Wed 18 Sept

EMBARGO UNTIL THURSDAY 1 AUGUST 1991

PRENTICE ACTS TO REMEDY ROUGH JUSTICE

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, is campaigning to get the law changed to protect housebuyers who are not told the full history of the property they want to buy.

Prentice has written to Labour's top legal spokesperson in the

House of Commons © John Morris QC MP © calling for the law to be tightened up to force house sellers to disclose full details to prospective buyers.

Prentice said: "Mr and Mrs Cliffe have suffered a terrible injustice. They decided to buy a property in Barnoldswick and in all good faith lodged £1,000 as a deposit on exchange of contract. They found out quite by chance that the previous occupier had hanged herself there in August last year. Quite understandably, they decided to pull out but have had to forfeit the original £1,000 deposit plus further sums totalling about 8% of the full purchase price. All in all, they are out of pocket to the tune of £3,000. This is money they can ill afford to lose. It is rough justice and the law must be changed."

Prentice continued: "I have been in touch with the Lord Chancellor's Department who have offered tea and sympathy to Mr and Mrs Cliffe but nothing else. They say it would be next to impossible to frame a new duty on house sellers to disclose everything which may cause a purchaser to think twice about buying a particular house. Absolute rubbish © but typical of the mind numbing complacency I have come to expect from this Government. I'm not asking them to do the impossible © merely to do a little lateral thinking."

Prentice concluded "At present, in the standard Law Society Contract Forms, house vendors are asked to disclose "further particulars" about the property © but the question is not specific enough. Vendors should be under a duty to disclose whether, to the best of their knowledge, the property had ever been used for any criminal purpose over, say, the preceeding five years and whether there were any deaths in the property which had been reported to the coroner. This simple formulation © which is apparently beyond the wit of the Government to come up with ™would cover the Cliffe case with all its tragic and costly consequences."

Mrs Cliffe added: "When this happened my husband and I were totally devastated. I couldn't eat or sleep for three weeks. We are now beginning to get over it but I am determined to do what I can to protect others from falling into this kind of trap."Our savings have been wiped out. We can't afford to go on holiday this year and we can't afford to carpet the house we've now moved into. The whole thing has been an absolute nightmare."

Note to Editors

The exchange of contracts usually takes place about 10 © 14 days before completion when the parties to the sale respectively leave and occupy the property. The contract is legally binding on exchange. Mr and Mrs Cliffe now live at 42 Skipton Road, Earby. Telephone No 0282 844944.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 3 SEPTEMBER 1991

HOUSE OF HORRORS' COUPLE FIGHT ON (31/91)
Graham and Linda Cliffe - victims of the Barnoldswick "House of Horrors" affair have hit out at local Tory MP, John Lee, who sees no need for a change in the law to protect innocent homebuyers.

Mr and Mrs Cliffe lost £3,000 when they discovered after exchange of contracts but before completion that the previous occupant of the house they had set their heart on had hanged herself in the hall. They pulled out of the sale.

The Cliffs, supported by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate Gordon Prentice, are campaigning for a change in the law to oblige homesellers to give details of the recent history of the property they wish to sell.
For immediate release 3 September

POLL TAX REPLACEMENT STILL UNFAIR says Prentice (32/91)

9 September 1991

PHOTOCALL
11am Tuesday 10 September 1991
at the Weavers Rooms, Frank Street
Barnoldswick

and then at 1.00pm at the Pendle Heritage Centre, Barrowford

.i.Andrew Bennett MP;, Former President of the Ramblers Association and campaigner and spokesperson on countryside issues will join Labour's Prospective Paliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice and Councillor Sally Lambert on a visit to a polluted tributary of Stocks Beck.

At 1.00pm, Andrew Bennett MP will meet members of the local Ramblers Association at the Pendle Heritage Centre. He will be joined by the Leader of Pendle Council, Councillor Susan Nike, on a walk along part of the Pendle Way.

For Immediate release 9 September 1991

LABOUR'S HEALTH CHIEF THANKS PENDLE (33/91)

Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, .i.Robin Cook;, has thanked the people of Pendle for supporting the campaign to keep local hospitals under local health authority control.

At a meeting at the House of Commons last week, Mr Cook told Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, that the result proved conclusively that support for opting out was paper thin. Only 20 submissions backed the opt out plans. Over 3,000 said no to Trust status and opt out.

Robin Cook said: "This ballot result is a triumph for local people. It is as plain as a pikestaff that Pendle people do not want their hospitals turned over to a

Trust. It is now up to the Tory Health Secretary to decide whether he wants to listen to local people or disregard their views."

Gordon Prentice added: "After all the glitzy and glossy propaganda, the Tories could only muster twenty supporters. Our Tory MP has totally misjudged the mood of his constituents. He should count to twenty before he ever again thinks of pronouncing on the National Health Service."

Ends
Note to Editors.

1.Caption: Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, shows Shadow Health Secretary, Robin Cook MP and Harriet Harman MP, some of the letters and petition forms against opt out.

2. The Health Secretary, William Waldegrave MP, is expected to decided on the application for Trust status by Burnley Health Care by October 7.

For Immediate Release 14 September 1991

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN (34/91)

Unemployment is up again in Pendle throwing fresh doubts on Government claims that the recession is coming to an end. The latest figures for August, released last Thursday, show that 2,815 Pendle people are jobless - almost 7% of the working population.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Over the past year, Pendle has had the highest rate of increase in .i.unemployment; in Lancashire. From August 90 to August 91 unemployment in Pendle rose 53%.

Prentice continued: "The Tory Government says a recovery is on the way but, if so, when will it reach Lancashire? Our industries are on the ropes and unemployment shows no signs of levelling out let alone falling.

"They want us to give them credit for bringing down inflation and interest rates - which they jacked up in the first place - and to absolve them of any responsibility for unemployment and the collapse of our manufacturing base. They'll be asking us next to believe they are responsible for sunshine - but not for rain.

ENDS

Note to Editors

1. In June 91, there were 2,608 people unemployed in Pendle. In July -2,752 and in August 2,815. (All official Department of Employment figures). In August 1990 there were 1,841 people unemployed in Pendle.

2. Unemployment in Lancashire as a whole in August 1990 was 36,307. In August 1991 it was 50,111.

For Immediate Release 14 September 1991

WATER TORTURE" JIBE BY PRENTICE (35/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has been inundated with complaints about the Standing Charges for water. He told the Nelson Leader (insert newspaper) that increased charges were causing problems for many local people - especially the elderly.

Prentice said: ".i.North West Water; is soaking Pendle with their standing charges. For people on a metered supply, the standing charge is now £103. There is an additional bill on top of that for the water actually used. For many elderly people struggling to get by on an inadequate pension it is, quite simply, water torture.

Prentice continued: "Since water privatisation, the floodgates have opened. Charges have shot up with no regard to the prevailing inflation rates. There are no rebates for water bills so many people face real problems. A comprehensive review of the entire system of water charges is urgently needed."

Note to Editors

1. In the North West Water area the domestic standing charge for people on a metered supply is £103. This breaks down in the following way. Sewerage element of the standing charge = £56. (Last year this was £49. An increase of 14.3%) Water element of the standing charge = £47. (Last year this was £42. An increase of 11.9%) Overall, the standing charge element of the water bill has increased by over 13%.

2. The standing charge for an unmetered supply has gone up 13.4% from £21.25 to £24.10.

3. Under changes introduced by the Conservative Government, people on Income Support have to pay water rates out of their weekly benefit.

For Immediate Release : 13 September 1991

PRENTICE ACCUSES LIBERAL DEMOCRATS OF 'FUDGE AND MUDGE' OVER NHS (36/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has launched a withering attack on the Liberal Democrats' health policy - or lack of it. At the Liberal Democrat Conference this week, delegates passed a contradictory resolution opposing - and supporting - Hospital Trusts. With the application by Burnley Health Care for Trust status to be decided soon, this is a red hot issue in Pendle.

Prentice said: "The Liberal Democrats ought to wear red noses all year round and not just on red nose day. How on earth can people begin to take them seriously? One moment, their leader backs the Tories and says Trust hospitals should stay. The next, their Party President Charles Kennedy says the second wave of Trust applications in April 92 should be stopped - but the first wave re-considered on a case by case basis. Then a bemused Conference, on Kennedy's advice, carries a resolution facing two ways at once. To do otherwise said Kennedy would make them look silly.

"Their old soulmate and Alliance partner Dr David Owen would have described this as an unacceptable case of fudge and mudge."

"To cap it all, the Liberal Democrats here in Pendle have displayed complete indifference to the application by Burnley Health Care for Trust status. They couldn't even be bothered to register their opposition to the proposals in the recent Regional Health Authority consultation exercise."[1]

Prentice concluded: "The Liberal Democrats have spent the last week trying to convince us they have worked out policies on everything. Yet they can't even get their act together on something of such fundamental importance as the National Health Service."

ENDS

For immediate release 4 September 1991

PENDLE SAYS NO TO OPT OUT PLANS (37/91)

Pendle people have given a resounding "no" to plans by Burnley Health care to take local hospitals and clinics out of .i.health; authority control.

The North west Regional Health Authority, who organised the public consultation, received 3,162 seperate representations from organisations and individuals. Only 20 (twenty) were in favour of the opt out proposals. A separate petition containing over 750 signatures of people objecting to the proposed opt out was submitted by the Pendle Labour Party.

For immediate release 23 September 1991

"BRAVADO" IN THE BLUE CORNER (38/91

Press reports that Pendle's Tory MP is itching for the General Election to be declared have been dismissed by his Labour opponent, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice commented: "This is the kind of mock bravado I expect to hear from the man who has spent the last year studiously avoiding any contact with me. He has refused to answer repeated calls to debate key issues with me such as the poll tax and the future of the health service. At least during the election

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Note to Editors.

[1] The Pendle Liberal Democrats did not respond to the RHA consultation exercise. The Pendle Labour Party submitted a petition against opt out containing over 750 names. Labour controlled Pendle Council also argued against opt out.

2 The 20 representations supporting opt out included 5 members of the public, two Tory authorities (Ribble Valley and Wyre BC), 1 Tory MP (Winston Churchill), the Blackburn Conservative Group of councillors, 1 General Practitioner, 3 DHAs and 2 hospital trusts. 3,162 representations were received opposing the opt out proposal.

campaign he will be forced to come out of his corner and engage in real debate."

Prentice did not express any concerns about the outcome of the contest: "Our Tory MP is a professional shadow boxer. He spends all his time and energy avoiding the issues."

For Immediate Release 23 September 1991

PRENTICE PINS BLAME ON MAJOR (39/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has told voters in Earby that the record of the Prime Minister will be a key issue in the forthcoming General Election campaign in Pendle.

Speaking to a packed meeting at the Station Hotel in Earby earlier this week, Prentice said: "John Major has developed a reputation as the teflon man of the Tory Party. None of the nasty and mean minded things he has done over recent years seems to stick. Everyone associates him with cricket bats and things like pie and chips."

"The reality is a bit less cuddly. Our own Tory MP here in Pendle is an enthusiastic supporter of the Prime Minister which is rather ironic given John Major's role in developing and implementing policies that have next to no support here. Major was responsible for the withdrawal of benefits for all 16 and 17 year olds including pregnant girls. He insisted that people on benefit had to pay 20% poll tax (it now costs more to collect than it raises). He was responsible for the freezing of Child Benefit from 1987 to 1989. And so it goes on.

"He is on a high at the moment" said Prentice "But his past will catch up with him. It always does.

For Immediate Release 23 SEPTEMBER 1991

HEALTH CHIEFS GRILLED BY PRENTICE (40/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has taken a swipe at Maggie Aikman - the health chief who is masterminding the plans by Burnley Health Care to take local hospitals and clinics out of health authority control.

Prentice said: "I wrote to Ms Aikman seven weeks ago to ask if the lack of support for the opt out proposals from the consultants, nurses, GPs, health workers and the general public counted for anything. I wanted to know if Burnley Health Care would withdraw its application for Trust status. Since then the silence from Ms Aikman's office has been deafening."

Undaunted, Prentice commented: "I have again written to Ms Aikman to ask her when she is likely to be in a position to reply to my original letter - and I shall keep on writing until I get a reply."

In a separate move, Prentice warned District Health Authority chairman, James Rawson, to stay out of the forthcoming General Election campaign.

Prentice said: "There were reports during the last election that Mr Rawson was actively canvassing support for my Conservative opponent. He'd be well advised to stay out of it this time. Pendle's Tory MP doesn't need any help to advocate Trust hospitals and the virtues of competition in the provision of health care."

Prentice added:"Our MP believes passionately in opting out - unless he thinks it will lose him votes. Then you won't see a faster U turn."

Note to Editors
In his letter of 8 August, Prentice asked Ms Aikman to comment on the report that opt out plans by hospitals in the East Cumbria Health Authority had been shelved. Ms Aikman's counterpart - the acute hospital general manager - had told the Independent newspaper that there was "insufficient support for the proposal".

For immediate release: 23 September 1991

PENDLE JOBLESS COSTS £20m A YEAR says Prentice (42/91)

Unemployment in Pendle is costing a staggering £20m a year according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary candidate, Gordon Prentice.

The shock figures - which were published by the Labour Party this week - were calculated using a financial model developed by the statistical section of the House of Commons library - an independent and authoritative source.

The survey showed that unemployment in the UK is costing over £20 billion a year - 10% of the total planned Government expenditure of £200 billion in 91/92. The survey looks at the real cost of unemployment - increased benefits, loss of revenue to the Exchequer from foregone taxes and other direct and indirect costs.

Prentice said: "The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont, said "unemployment is a price well worth paying" to turn the economy around. Well, the theory is wrong and the maths are abysmal. In July this year, unemployment here in Pendle cost £20.6 million - up £7.6m on the year before. The figures take your breath away.

Note to Editors.

1 Unemployment in Britain costs every man, woman and child £7 per week.

2 Over the past year unemployment in Pendle has risen faster than in any other constituency in Lancashire.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 8 OCTOBER 1991

PRENTICE GIVES SEND OFF TO MARCH FOR JOBS (43/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, and Burnley MP, Peter Pike, gave the Lancashire March for Jobs a rousing send off at the Burnley Miners Social Club last Monday.
For Immediate Release 8 October 1991

PRENTICE PUTS LIBDEMS UNDER THE MICROSCOPE (44/91)

A "teach in" on the Liberal Democrats at last week's Labour Party Conference in Brighton was a "rip roaring" success according to Labour's Gordon Prentice who organised the event.
For immediate release 8 October 1991

LABOUR WILL WIN PENDLE SAYS NEW POLL (45/91)

Labour support in the North west has soared according to an ICM poll for the Press Association. The poll sampled the voting intentions of more than 10,000 people nationwide making this one of the largest and most sophisticated measures of public opinion.

PHOTOCALL: DOUG HENDERSON MP (46/91)

MONDAY 21 OCTOBER 1991

1.30pm at the Marsden Cross Inn
Higher Reedley Road, Brierfield, Nelson

Doug Henderson MP - front bench spokesperson on the brewing industry in Labour's Trade and Industry team - and Gordon Prentice, Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, will join Pat Kerry - President of the Burnley Licensed Victuallers Association to discuss the problems facing the licensed trade.

Note to Editors:

A Briefing on Labour's policy on the brewing industry is enclosed

For Immediate Release: 15 October 1991

DRIVING INSTRUCTORS DRIVEN TO DESPAIR ;says Prentice (47/91)

Labour's Gordon Prentice is backing Pendle's Driving Instructors who fear the biggest operator in Britain - the British School of Motoring - is poaching their trade.

Prentice said: "Learner drivers who apply for a provisional licence receive in the same mailing a cascade of promotional material from BSM. From the BSM's point of view, it is good business. Their advertising is targetted on exactly the people they want to reach. But it also puts local self employed .i.driving instructors; at a tremendous disadvantage. They see their potential clients being syphoned off by the British School of Motoring.

Prentice added: "I have asked Peter Snape MP - a front bench member of Labour's Transport Team - to raise the issue in the House of Commons. I want to know who gave the go ahead for this; how much BSM paid for this exclusive access to learner drivers and whether any consideration was given to the impact on thousands of self employed driving instructors nationwide.

ENDS

Note to Editors:

Local Driving Instructors available for comment include Shaun Turner (0282 693560) and Jim Blackburn (0282 868258).

For immediate release: 15 October 1991

HOSPITAL OPT OUTS TO GET GO-AHEAD predicts Prentice (48/91)

A decision is expected this week on the application by Burnley Health Care to take local hospitals and clinics out of health authority control.
The Secretary of State for Health, William Waldegrave MP, is to rule on more than 100 applications for "trust status". The decision follows the surprise announcement during the Conservative Party Conference last week that London teaching hospitals are to be excluded from the second wave of hospital opt outs.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, said: "If - as I believe - the Government gives the green light to Burnley Health Care it will be an absolute travesty of democracy. The Tories asked for our views. They got them. And now they ignore them. They have given the doctors a stinging slap in the face."

"I am appalled at the way in which the views of experienced senior medical staff have been tossed in the waste bin by Burnley Health Care without a second thought.

"In the report of the consultation carried out by the NW RHA into the Burnley Health Care opt out application, a number of responses from senior medical staff were, inexplicably, included in an "unclear response" category. I have read through the responses and I am absolutely flabbergasted that crystal clear expressions of opposition to opt out should be classified as "unclear". It is not as if we are struggling with Esperanto; we all speak the same language!" (see note 4)

Note to Editors

1. All information cited here is non confidential and is available for inspection by the general public - either at the HQ of the NW Regional Health Authority or at the local CHC.

2. In the whole area of the Burnley Pendle and Rossendale District Health Authority, the official consultation on the opt out proposals - organised by the North West Regional Health Authority - brought forward 20 representations in support of opt out and 3,162 against.

3. Those supporting opt out included : 3 District Health Authorities; 1 FHSA; 1 group of GPs; 1 member of staff; 1 staff group; 2 Conservative local authorities; the Blackburn Conservative Group of Councillors; 1 MP (Winston

Churchill); 1 Health Worker ; three Trusts and 5 members of the general public.

4. The Regional Health Authority created a third category of responses which were classified as "unclear". These included submissions from Dr David Thistlewaite, a consultant paediatrician, who said "A Trust can determine for itself what it provides and what it does not; that care need not be comprehensive...This application has gone ahead without consultants being involved in its compilation hence important clinical implications have not been addressed."

Dr Patterson, a consultant physician at Burnley General, said: "I am writing to oppose (Dr Patterson's underlining) the application of Burnley Health Care to become an NHS Trust. The recent ballot of the consultant medical staff showed the application does not have the support of medical staff despite the application document giving the impression the medical staff were in agreement. Trust status will do nothing for patient care.

Mr I>W> Mahady, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and Chairman of the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Medical Staff Committee wrote: "The vast majority of consultant opinion is against Trust status for Burnley Health care. It is extremely distressing to find that the administration of Burnley Health Care have taken little notice of Consultant Opinion and are proceeding in their application for Trust Status.

"MASHED POTATO BRAINS" JIBE BY PRENTICE

The Conservative's Citizen's Charter which was unveiled last week by the Prime Minister has been lambasted by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice told a packed meeting of the Party's ruling General Committee in Nelson last weekend that the Tories obviously believed voters' brains were made of mashed potato. "How else can we explain the remarkable decision made by the Tories to portray themselves as the Party that gives people rights. We all know they've spent the last twelve years abolishing, denying and refusing rights."

Prentice continued: "The Tories have clearly been consulting their public relations advisers who have told them that "rights" is the new buzz word for the nineties. The problem with this strategy is that people aren't idiots and they can see behind the advertising puff."

Prentice said: "I can give details of ten rights abolished by the Tories for every one promised in their overblown Citizen's Charter. In 1979 everyone had the right to a free eye test. Now it has gone. In 1979 everyone had the right to a free dental check up. Gone. In 1979 schoolchildren had the right to a nutritious school meal. Gone. In 1979 defendants in court had the right to challenge jurors without giving reasons. No longer. "35,000 local government workers could exercise their democratic rights by standing for election to the House of Commons or to a local authority other than the one that employed them. Gone. In 1979, young people under 21 were able to have their employment

rights protected by a wages council. That right has gone.
"In 1979, a woman in work had a right to be re©instated after she had a baby. Now, if she works for a small firm, that right has gone. In 1979, students had the same rights to social security benefits as other people. In 1991 they had lost their rights to housing benefit and income support"

"It is a litany of lost opportunities. Citizens' rights have been abolished or ignored for over a decade and the Tories now expect plaudits for their new Charter. They've got the cheek of the devil."
ENDS
Note to Editors

The Charter guarantees maximum waiting times for NHS treatment. In 1979 there were 695,000 people on NHS waiting lists. In 1990 this had swollen to 957,000.The Charter promises "better railways". In 1979 the Government's Public Sector Obligation Grant to British Rail was 1,098m. By 1990/1 this had collapsed to 474m. Over the past eleven years, over 3 billion in Government subsidy has been withdrawn from the railways.

For Immediate Release: 15 October 1991

LOW PAY IN PENDLE 'A DISGRACE' says Prentice (49/91)

At a public meeting to be held on Thursday 17 October, organised by the Pendle Trades Council, Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, will say:

"The Conservatives have created - as a deliberate act of policy - a low tech, low wage economy where long term opportunities for growth are being stunted. Training is being neglected to an alarming degree. The Tories believe Britain can prosper simply by undercutting the wage rates of our competitors. What short sighted nonsense!

"If low wages were the road to future prosperity, the Sudan would be one of the world's most successful economies. In reality, low wages encourage employers to compete simply by cutting costs rather than by raising standards across industry."

"The Tory Government has done more than any since the industrial revolution to increase dependency on state support for people in work. There are more people reliant on state benefits than ever before. Many people in Britain today receive wages which by any civilised standards are simply inadequate. People should not have to turn to the DSS for subsistence. It should be the responsibility of the employer not the taxpayer to pay a decent working wage to all of their workforce.

"The Conservative Government is today isolated in Europe over the European Social Charter to which it has been entirely hostile. Government opposition to Labour's National Minimum Wage will entrench this isolation even further as every other country in the EC has .i.minimum wage ;protection. Government plans to abolish the Wages Council system will leave Britain as the only member of the EC without any minimum wage legislation.

"Here in Pendle this week - in October 1991 - people are living on poverty wages, The Job Centre in Colne is offering cleaning jobs at £2.35p an hour. Occupations covered by Wages Councils offer £2.66p an hour (hairdressing); £2.48p an hour (clothing manufacture) and £2.95p (retail food).

"The European Community is currently looking at measures to ensure "equitable wages" across the community. The EC argued recently that: "Europe cannot hope to occupy a leading position at world level if it bases its competitiveness on low wages". I agree with this statement and that is why we in the Labour Party are determined to introduce a national minimum wage starting at £3.40p an hour in 1991/2.

ENDS
For Immediate Release 16 October 1991

PHOTOCALL: DOUG HENDERSON MP AT LONTEX INDUSTRIES (50/91)

Monday 21 October 1991

11.20 am. .i.Doug Henderson MP ;- a front bench member of Labour's Trade and Industry Team - and Gordon Prentice, Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, will visit Lontex Industries, Carpet Yarn Manufacturers, Fernbank, Barnoldswick.

For Immediate Release: 22 October 1991

RESIGN NOW!' says Prentice to local health chief (51/91)

Labour's Gordon Prentice has told local health chief .i.James Rawson; to resign as Chairman of the Burnley Pendle and Rossendale District Health Authority.

In a letter to Rawson this week, an outraged Prentice said it was "clearly inappropriate" for him to wear two hats as Chairman Designate of the opt out Burnley Health Care Trust and Chairman of the District Health Authority. Under the Tories new plans for .i.health;, Rawson's Trust would be selling medical services to his own District Health Authority!"

Prentice continued: "There is a clear conflict of interest. I know from long experience that in any other sphere of public service this would not be tolerated for a moment."

An angry Prentice said: "Where do these people come from anyway? No-one elects them. James Rawson just materialised out of swirling mists to become Chairman Designate of the opt out Trust. These people owe their position to appointment and patronage - not election. I want to make it crystal clear now that a Labour Government will ensure that those occupying senior positions

in the health service are representative of local people and are committed to the NHS."

ENDS

Note to Editors

Letter to James Rawson attached.

Letter for Publication: 22 October 1991

Dear Editor

The centrepiece of the next Tory manifesto is likely to be a change in the inheritance laws to allow - in John Major's own words - a "cascade of wealth down the generations". For most people in Pendle this is going to be of no relevance whatsoever.

John Major's "classless society" will be a long time in coming if vast fortunes are to be inherited free of all tax. It will widen, grotesquely, the yawning gap between rich and poor.

At present, .i.inheritance tax; begins to bite at £140,000 and above. Property is the main source of wealth passed down the generations but here in Pendle only 1% of houses are valued at £130,000 or above.

"Indeed, the average value of inheritances between 1985 and 1989 according to the respected, independent Joseph Rowntree Foundation was £29,730 - well below the current £140,000 inheritance tax threshhold.

"In the North of England the average inheritance was just £13,000. John Major's promise of wealth "cascading down the generations" is totally fraudulent for the vast majority of people. In John Major's constituency of Huntingdon it may be different. Here in Pendle, and elsewhere in the North West, no chance.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 22 October 1991

'CREEPING PRIVATISATION OF NHS IN PENDLE" claims Prentice (52/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, told Party workers at a meeting in Barnoldswick last Sunday that evidence was "all around" of the "creeping privatisation" of the NHS in Pendle.

"Everyone who uses the heath service knows that it is fraying round the edges. People are expected to wait so long for treatment that going private - for those who can afford it - becomes the only option.

"I give one case study drawn from the recent experience of a good friend of mine here in Pendle. After feeling unwell for some time, and with unsettling symptoms showing themselves, Jill Smith (I do not use her real name) took herself along to her GP who recommended she see a specialist. On the NHS, Jill was told, this would take 18 weeks. However, if she paid she could see a consultant much sooner - within three weeks.

"Jill paid £85 to see the consultant who told her that he was unsure what was wrong "but that it could be something sinister". He said it should be checked out right away. Again, the option was a four month wait on the NHS or speedy private treatment. Understandably, Jill chose the latter course. She was worried sick about her .i.health; and wanted it over and done with as soon as possible. She was booked in to a local hospital for less than one day and - by the greatest good fortune - found that her condition could be treated successfully. Her one day in hospital cost her £420.

"Jill's experience is typical of many. She was fortunate in that she could afford to pay and that her condition could be treated. Anyone would have done the same. But what about the woman totally reliant on the NHS - without £505 to pay for private treatment? What would have happened to her?

"Free at the point of use" sounds fine but it is totally meaningless if you are forced to go private to get speedy treatment, said Prentice.

ends

For Immediate Release: 22 October 1991

PRENTICE DEMANDS HELP FOR TEXTILES (53/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, and Labour Trade and Industry spokesperson, Doug Henderson, have called for urgent Government action to help the North West's ailing .i.textile industry;.

This week, the Labour duo called in at Lontex Industries in Barnoldswick - the carpet yarn makers - and at Thomas Mason in Colne which is closing shortly after 200 years in operation.

Prentice said: "It breaks my heart to see skilled workers given their cards. What Napoleon couldn't do to Thomas Masons, the Tories have done. They've closed the firm down. In every other country with a textile industry of any consequence, the Government is in there - helping, promoting, advising and investing. But here in Tory Britain the hands off policy towards industrial investment is killing our industries. People don't want preferential treatment - they want a level playing field where we compete on equal terms with our competitors. Instead we've got the Tories selling Britain's manufacturing industries short.

Prentice concluded: "The best thing you can say about the Tories is that they know how to spin a yarn. They know nothing about textiles and even less about how to manage a successful modern manufacturing economy.

ends

For Immediate Release: 22 October 1991

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN (54/91)

Pendle's .i.unemployment; is up again. The September figures released last week show the number of people out of work at 2,782 - up a staggering 52% on this time last year.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, said: "These jobless totals move upwards every month with the steady regularity of a metronome.

"The Chancellor of the Exchequer believes "unemployment is a price worth paying to get inflation down". But how the Tories can say this with a straight face beats me. They unleashed inflation in 1988 in the first place and they are now trying to pass responsibility on to everyone else.

"The present levels of unemployment are a direct result of Government policy. There is no-one else to blame. Not a puff of smoke. Not the laws of nature. Just the Tories.
ends

For Immediate Release: 22 October 1991

NOT SO NICE, MR MAJOR (55/91)

Labour's Gordon Prentice has again waded in to the "cricket bats and Happy Eater" image of Prime Minister .i.John Major;.

Speaking to a meeting of Party members in Colne last Friday, Prentice said: " This man is coated in teflon. This week, the Prime Minister is smiling broadly as he gives pensioners a meagre 4.1% increase in their pensions. The increases in income support, attendance allowances, widow's pensions and child benefit are pitched at a level he thinks he can just about get away with.

"This strategy works with people with severe amnesia but not for everyone else. John Major:

* Restructured the Social Security system by cutting the real terms value of benefit for 43% of claimants and cut benefit for 12% in cash terms

* Abolished benefit entitlement for 16 and 17 year olds

* Replaced Single Payment grants based on entitlement with cash limited Social Fund Discretionary loans, which are refused if the claimant cannot afford to repay them

* Introduced a 20% Poll Tax contribution for people on benefit

* Cut mortgage interest payments by half for the first 4, later 6, months of unemployment

* Replaced the 6 week qualification period with a 13, later 26 week, benefit disqualification period for people deemed to be voluntarily unemployed

* Abolished disability benefits for 9 out of 10 people injured at work

* Abolished the £25 universal Maternity Grant and replaced it with a means tested payment to new mothers on Income Support which was worth less than the Maternity Grant and previous means tested payments.

* Cut by 50% the SERPS benefits for people retiring after 1999

John Major used the Social Security ladder as a teenager and then kicked it away when others needed it:

* As a teenager John Major gave up work to help care for his father, When he started to look for work again in 1962 he signed on aged 19 and received £2. 17. 6. per week in unemployment benefit for at least 9 months - equivalent to £51.40p today.

* As Prime Minister, he pays only £41.40 in Unemployment Benefit to others in the same position.

* If John Major were unemployed today he would be refused Unemployment Benefit and would only be eligible for the reduced rate of Income Support, £31.15 per week

For Immediate Release: 28 October 1991

PAY IT BACK! Prentice tells Tories (56/91)

Labour's outspoken Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has called on the Tories to hand back the £1.5 million given to them by Mr .i.Asil Nadir;, the disgraced chairman of Polly Peck International who is charged with 58 counts of theft totalling just under £130m.

The move by Prentice comes as a letter from Conservative Party Chairman, Chris Patten MP, is circulating among Pendle's Tory supporters urging them to donate more cash to the Party.

Last weekend, Prentice told a meeting of the local Labour Party's ruling General Committee in Barnoldswick that the Tory Chairman should hand back any "tainted money" should Nadir be found guilty of the theft charges. Polly Peck's creditors have more right to the cash than the Tories."

Prentice continued: "Instead of painting a ludicrously rosy picture of life in Britain today in his letter to supporters, he should be telling them of the sordid depths that have been plumbed in order to raise cash. Money from foreign millionaires. Money from people charged with fraud and theft. All accepted with a smile.

Note to editors

This coming Sunday, 3 November, prominent Hong Kong businessmen will be among 40 guests invited to a fund raising lunch at Blenheim Palace, home of the Marquis of Blandford. The Prime Minister is to be the guest of honour (The Independent 7 October 1991. p2)

For Immediate Release: 28 October 1991

PRENTICE SPARKS NEW ROW OVER ELECTRICITY CHARGES (57/91)

NORWEB - the North West's recently privatised electricity company - has been accused of overcharging its customers to the tune of £20m.

According to Offer the new electricity watchdog, the regional electricity companies wrongly forecast the rate of inflation for the year when they set their price increases on 1 April. Prices are supposed to be linked to movements in the retail price index.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, said: "Cumulatively, the sums involved are significant. For the Pendle area, it is estimated that the excess charge for the average household is £6.00. Multiply that by the number of households in Pendle and it is quite obvious that .i.NORWEB; has made quite a killing.

"If the regulations mean anything at all, there should be an immediate reduction of £6.00 in everyone's electricity bill" said Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 28 October 1991

STUDENTS WILL BE HIT BY TORY COUNCIL TAX warns Prentice (58/91)

Pendle's .i.students; will be among those hardest hit by the Tories proposed Council Tax says Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

The Government plans to bring in the new .i.Council Tax; to replace the Poll Tax in April 1993.

Prentice said: "The Council Tax is a real dog's dinner that keeps many of the worst features of the Poll Tax. Student days should be stimulating and rewarding - not blighted by poverty and debt.

"We now know that students will not be eligible for rebates, only for a "personal discount" of 25% if they are the first or second resident in a house. In the overwhelming majority of cases this won't apply as students will be in halls of residence or in houses in multiple occupation.

"It was like drawing teeth to get John Major to admit he had six O levels. He made it to Downing Street without an A level but that doesn't give him the right to penalise young people who want to benefit from further and higher education. If the Tories keep heaping new burdens onto our students - making it ever more difficult to stay the course - his vision of a classless society will have taken on an entirely different meaning.

Note to Editors.

1. At present, all students are eligible for 80% reductions in Poll Tax. But the Government plans to limit the Council Tax student discount to 25%. People on Income Support get £500 a year more than a student on full grant and are to be eligible for up to 100% rebates.

2. Labour is pledged to scrap Student Loans, introduced by the present Government.

For Immediate Release: 28 October 1991

POLL TAX PUSHES PENDLE PEOPLE INTO POVERTY says Prentice (59/91)

The number of people in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale having .i.poll tax; arrears deducted from Income Support* has more than doubled in the three months to August.

Figures from the Benefits Agency show that in August 779 Income Support claimants in Burnley Pendle and Rossendale were having poll tax arrears deducted from their benefit. In May 1991, the figure was 303. Nationally, the figures are 89,089 (August total) and 57,802 (May).

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, said: "Michael Heseltine has said that those on benefit will not have to pay the proposed Council Tax - although we wait to see the small print in the Bill when it is published. And councils everywhere have told him that it doesn't make sense to pursue benefit claimants for their 20% Poll Tax liability. Some of the debts will never be collected.

"Money is being taken from people who are existing on appallingly low benefits - £39.65 a week for a single person over 25, £62.25 for a couple. Income Support was supposed to provide a safety net, but now, over one million people are falling through holes in the net.

"There should be 100% Poll Tax rebates now for pensioners, the unemployed and those on benefit. If it is to apply to the Tories proposed new .i.Council Tax;, why can't it apply to the Poll Tax now? This year - and for a further year from April 1992 - councils will be obliged to impose this punitive poll tax on the very poorest. Pursuing, through the Courts, those who simply cannot pay.

ends

Note to Editors

* Income Support is a Social Security benefit to help people with very low incomes. It is available, for example, to people who are over 60, sick or with disabilities or are unemployed.

The figures shown above cover the Burnley Pendle and Rossendale constituencies. They are aggregates from local benefits offices.

For Immediate Release :11 April 1991

FAIR RATES MEAN HUGE SAVINGS FOR PENDLE says Prentice (60/91)

Labour's alternative to the .i.Poll Tax; - .i.Fair Rates; - would mean big savings for Pendle people according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

"Figures released last week (ie on 10 April) show that under Labour's Fair Rates household bills in Pendle would fall dramatically to £185. And that household figure could be reduced still further under Labour's extended rebates scheme designed to benefit single pensioners on low incomes and other vulnerable groups.

Prentice continued: "The average rates per household in Pendle in 1989/90 (the last year of the old rating system) was about £160. After the horrendous experience of the Poll Tax, Labour's Fair Rates will mark a return to sanity. Our figures have been validated by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and stand detailed scrutiny. The sums add up."

"Our figures are well below the current Pendle Poll Tax - even after the Tory Budget bribe. The Tories are now in a complete mess - constantly postponing details of their new Property Poll Tax. John Major is like a rabbit caught in headlights - transfixed and unable to move. The Tory Party Chairman, Chris Patten, is, in his own words, 'gobsmacked'. What an indictment!"

Prentice continued: "The Liberal Democrats are planning to release details of their Local Income Tax for Pendle but if it is anything like the figure they gave last year (£424 per household) there won't be much for Pendle people to cheer about.

"The fact is their back of the envelope calculations are of interest only to themselves. No-one seriously believes there will be a Liberal Democrat

Government after the next General Election or that their tax plans will ever be implemented. Before criticising our detailed figures they should practice a bit more on their abacus."

Note to Editors

1. The average household Poll Tax in Pendle in the current year is £386. (The number of persons in a household in Pendle is calculated using Government figures - dividing the population by the number of domestic heriditaments - ie family units in independent living accommodation). This figure is calculated after the budget reduction of £140 but before the application of Poll Tax Relief. Under Labour's Fair Rates the average household bill in Pendle will fall to £185 - a saving of £201. Nationally, over 7 out of 10 families will gain from the move from the Poll Tax to Labour's Fair Rates.

2. Labour's Fair Rates will be financed by redirecting £1.4 billion from the Poll Tax reduction scheme; saving £400 million from lower administrative costs and £1.4 billion from higher collection rates. Property taxes are much easier to collect than head taxes.

For release: Monday 4 November 1991

BBC PREDICTS LABOUR MP FOR PENDLE (61/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has been asked to appear on the prestigious Radio 4 Today Programme on the morning following the General Election to comment on the shape of the new political map of Britain.

The BBC has invited Prentice - as the likely new MP for Pendle - to join two other MPs in a running commentary with Brian Redhead from 10am -11am.

Prentice said: "It is extremely encouraging that the BBC has come to the conclusion Labour will win Pendle. Of course, there is only one ballot that counts - and that is the one on election day itself. It will be Pendle's referendum on 13 years of Tory Government."

Note to Editors

1. The Pendle Count will be carried live by the BBC. The result is expected before midnight.

For Immediate Release: 30 October 1991

HOUSE REPOSSESSIONS HIT NEW HIGH IN PENDLE says Prentice (62/91)

.i.House repossessions; in Pendle have soared by 28% over the past year according to figures released by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Last year - in the period from January 1990 to August 1990 - 60 local families lost their homes as a result of actions for repossession at Nelson County Court by the banks and building societies. In the same period in 1991, the figure rose to 77.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Behind these stark figures lie mortgage misery. Each one represents a real human tragedy - local people forced from their homes because they cannot afford to keep up with mortgage payments.

"Labour would introduce a mortgage rescue scheme which would allow the owner in mortgage difficulties to keep part of the equity, paying rent on the rest, while the property is bought by a housing association or local authority.

"These schemes cost less than putting families into bed and breakfast and reduce dependence on housing benefit. And they avoid the distress of eviction. Repossession should not automatically mean eviction - particularly as circumstances like interest rate rises and often unemployment are beyond the control of the individual householder."

ends

Note to Editors
142 actions for repossession were entered by banks and building societies at Nelson County Court in the period January - August 1990. In the same period in 1991, 190 were entered - up 34%.

For Immediate Release: 4 November 1991

PENDLE'S YOUNG PEOPLE FACE 'JOBS CRISIS' says PRENTICE (63/91)

The number of young unemployed in Pendle surged by 66% in the year from July 1990 to July 91 according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice. The area's unemployed young people - between 18 and 24 - make up just over a third of Pendle's total jobless.

Prentice commented: "Pendle's young people are facing a jobs crisis of staggering proportions. The increase over the past year has been awesome. The Tories are presiding over the biggest explosion in .i.unemployment; in Europe and all we get from them is the mantra that "unemployment is a price well worth paying". The Prime Minister even says that if it isn't hurting it isn't working. Well, let me tell him that it is hurting here in Pendle and our young people aren't working either.

"We need to get young people into work now - as a priority. A secure, well paid job - with training and opportunities to learn new skills - should be on offer to every young person in Pendle. Instead of being helped into the world of work, our young people are being pitchforked onto the dole before they've even started."

Labour's Gordon Prentice has made jobs and the state of the local economy a key theme. Ron Leighton, Labour MP for Newham North East and Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Employment is to visit Pendle this month as part of the local Labour party's "Drive for Jobs" campaign.

Notes to Editor see over

PENDLE'S YOUNG PEOPLE FACE JOBS CRISIS cont

Note to Editor

1. Over the period July 90 - July 91, under 25 unemployment increased in the UK by 44% compared with an European Community average of 4%.

2. Britain has the fastest rising rate of unemployment in Europe. In the year ending July 1991 unemployment rose in the European Community by 800,000. Remarkably, 700,000 of this increase was in the UK.

3. Pendle's increase in young unemployment was more than double the increase in the North West (see below).

4. PENDLE: UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE AGED 18 - 24

	July 1990	July 1991	% increase
male	402	656	63.2
female	167	287	71.9
total	569	943	65.7
(North West Region:	75,039	98,981	32%)
Great Britain	460,059	706,620	54%

5. One in 7 of Britain's 18 - 24 year olds are unemployed. For young men, the position is 1 in 6 of 18 - 19 year olds and nearly 1 in 5 of those aged between 20 - 24.

6. Nearly 500,000 young unemployed people will be able to vote for the first time in the General Election next year.

ends

For Immediate Release: 5 November 1991

GiVE STUDENT NURSES A FAIR DEAL says Prentice (64/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has launched a fierce attack on Government "concessions" to student nurses over the controversial "Council Tax" - the Tories answer to the discredited Poll Tax.

In a last minute change of heart, the Environment Secretary, Michael Heseltine, decided that .i.student nurses; on "Project 2,000" living in nurses homes or student accommodation would be exempt from the new council tax.

Prentice said: "As predicted, the Council Tax is nothing other than a Whitehall farce. There is not a single student nurse in Pendle who will benefit from this so called concession. It applies only to student nurses on Project 2,000 and there are none in this area. The Tories should exempt all student nurses from the Council Tax and not just a few for PR purposes. The Tories really take the biscuit.

Note to Editors

1. Project 2,000 is a new degree level training course for nurses. It is being introduced on a phased basis throughout the country with the Government deciding when to give the go ahead in each District Health Authority area.

2. Nurses on Project 2,000 will get an automatic 100% rebate on their Council Tax Bills. All other student nurses will have to pay 75% of their Council Tax..

3. Nurses on Project 2,000 receive a grant of £4,000 if they are under 26 and £4,500 if they are over 26. Student Nurses (not on Project 2,000) earn from £6,325 to £7,315 over their three year training period.

For Immediate Release: 13 November 1991

PRENTICE SLAMS MP OVER COUNCIL TAX (65/91)

Labour's Gordon Prentice has attacked Pendle's Conservative MP for voting in the Commons this week for the new .i.Council Tax ;- dubbed the "wretched tax" by John Lee's Parliamentary colleague, Ralph Howell.

Prentice - who was speaking to a meeting of Labour supporters in Nelson earlier this week - taunted Lee over his support for the new tax, designed to replace the Poll Tax in April 1993.

Prentice said: "By his vote, our Tory MP has nailed his colours to the mast and all his promises about a fair replacement to the Poll Tax is utter baloney."

Prentice asked: "Is it fair for the richest person in the City of Westminster to be charged £273 and the poorest person in Pendle to be charged £344? (see note 1). Is it fair for the richest single person in Pendle to get an automatic 25% discount on the tax while the poorest family has to stump up the full amount?

Is it sensible for the Council Tax Bill to be rushed through the House of Commons in three weeks in a mad dash to get it on to the statute book before the General Election? The Poll Tax - which was shot through with flaws - was given twice as much Parliamentary scrutiny as this Bill will get. (See note 2)

"Does our MP have any reservations at all about the Council Tax? People deserve to know where their MP stands on these issues. Silence is not an option for Members of Parliament who want to remain Members of Parliament" quipped Prentice.

Note to Editors

1. Government illustrative figures published April 1991 when the first seven bands were announced. (An eighth band for houses over £320,000 was added later)

2. John Major told the Daily Mail on 24 November last year: "I'll tell you about the Poll Tax. We were bounced into it quickly because there was such a fuss about the rates in Scotland and we were bounced without thinking because of the political fuss".

3. On 5 December 1990, John Lee confessed that he, and the rest of the Conservative Parliamentary Party, had been "clubbed and conned" into

supporting the "wretched policy" of the Poll tax (Hansard 5.12.91) In a letter to Prentice last December he said "...during the passage of the Community Charge legislation I was a Government minister and thus prevented from voting independently". The option of resignation from the Government was not considered by Lee. He is now a backbencher.

4. A report from the independent Local Government Information Unit (Poll Tax Costs 1988 - 93) (published November 1991) concludes that the Poll Tax has cost at least £19 billion from the time the first money was spent in setting up the system in Scotland in 1988. An extract is appended

For Immediate Release: 12 November 1991

PENDLE'S CHILDREN GET VIP TREATMENT! (66/91)

Labour's Shadow Minister for Children, .i.Joan Lestor MP;, will be making a special visit to Pendle on Saturday, 14 December to say hello to local children.

Joan, who is MP for Eccles, will be doing a whistle stop tour around the borough with Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

Their first port of call will be Pendle Labour Party's Kids Christmas Party.

Gordon said: "It's jelly and ice cream and no speeches! Everyone is looking forward to it tremendously."

ends

Note to Editors

1. Photographers and reporters welcome at the Pendle CLP Christmas Party at Ambulance Hall, Nelson at 3.00 pm on Saturday 14 December.

2. Labour aims to protect the rights of children and promote their interests through the appointment - in the next Labour Government - of a Minister for Children .

For Immediate Release: 12 November 1991

PENDLE GIVES THE RED ROSE WELCOME TO LONDON VISITORS (67/91)

An enthusiastic band of Labour supporters from .i.Lewisham; in South London will be getting a warm Lancashire welcome next weekend* as guests of the local Labour party.

The twelve strong group are part of an "exchange visit" between the two constituencies. They will be touring the area over the weekend getting to know the people and places in this corner of North East Lancashire.

Ian McKenzie - who organised the trip from the London end - said: "If people think we eat jellied eels and live in Albert Square they're going to be disappointed!"

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, said: "This is going to be a fun weekend. In the new year, we shall be organising the return leg when Pendle's advance guard goes south to the capital."

"Stereotypes are generally wide of the mark. In London the streets aren't everywhere paved with gold. Tory policies have crippled parts of London just as they have here in the North West. In Lewisham, unemployment is almost twice as high as in Pendle - and that's bad enough."

Note to Editors

1. Bridget Prentice is Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Lewisham East. The sitting Tory MP is junior Energy Minister Colin Moynihan.

2. Photographers welcome at the Cross Keys in Barnoldswick on Saturday evening, 23 November and at the Clarion House on Sunday 24th from noon.

For Immediate Release: 12 November 1991

HEALTH CHIEF MUST GO insists Prentice (68/91

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has told local .i.health; chief, .i.James Rawson;, to resign immediately as Chair of the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale District Health Authority.

Last month, when the Health Secretary gave the go ahead to Burnley Health Care to opt out, Prentice told Rawson that he should not chair both the District Health Authority and the new Burnley Health Care. Prentice said there would be a clear conflict of interest with one organisation selling medical services to the other.

Prentice said: "It is quite unacceptable for Rawson to have a foot in both camps. There is no need for further prevarication. He should go now."

Note to editors

1. On 25 October, Rawson wrote to Prentice saying "I am currently Chairman of the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Health Authority and will remain in this position until I receive confirmation of my appointment as Chairman of the Burnley Health Care Trust." He has now received that confirmation.

For Immediate Release: 19 November 1991

PRENTICE FIRES BROADSIDE AGAINST TORY SCHOOLS BILL (69/91)

Tory proposals to privatise the school inspection service have been described as "bizarre" by Labour's Gordon Prentice. The .i.Schools Bill; - which was published last week - will force schools to seek tenders from private inspection agencies.

Prentice, who was addressing a meeting of parents in Colne earlier this week, said the proposals were hare brained and would do nothing to improve educational standards in local schools. "The Tories want every school inspection team to contain people who have no direct personal experience of teaching or school management. Whoever dreamed this one up needs their

head examined - preferably by a qualified NHS doctor and not by someone with a quack degree who has just walked in off the street!"

Prentice's scathing remarks were part of a wide ranging attack on Tory education policies. "The Tories have nothing to offer our hard pressed teachers and worried parents except privatisation and opting out. They have spent millions trying to persuade schools to opt out of their local education authority and become "grant maintained" from the Department of Education and Science but the policy has been a pathetic failure." (note 1)

Note to Editors

1. By September 1991 only 100 schools had opted out. This is 0.4% of the 25,000 schools in England and Wales. A Labour Government will immediately end opting out and quickly return the few grant maintained schools to the local community system that serves the vast majority of our children.

For Immediate Release: 20 November 1991

COLNE WOMAN DISPLAYS TRUE GRIT (70/91)

Long suffering Colne resident, Jean Povey, may soon have water that is safe to drink. That's the prediction of Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, who is backing Jean in her fight to get North West Water to clean up her lead laden water supply.

Prentice said: "Jean first complained to .i.North West Water; two months ago about the brown, gritty and smelly water that was gushing from her taps. She couldn't have a shower because of the grit. She couldn't have a bath because of the discoloured water. And her dog turned up his nose at the smelly water. Jean was at her wits end."

"As soon as I heard of Jean's plight I was on to North West Water who confirmed that her water had a very high lead content. They suggested she use the water from her neighbour's tap!"

Prentice is now insisting the corroded lead pipes are replaced without delay. "I have nothing but praise for the Environmental Health people at Pendle Council who moved with great urgency when the matter was drawn to their attention. But the response of North West Water leaves a lot to be desired. If their Chairman had brown, gritty water coming out of his tap it would be put right before you could say Jack Robinson."

Prentice concluded: "The experience of Mrs Povey begs the question of how many other homes in this area are affected by deteriorating lead pipes. Lead is not a .friendly metal" said Prentice. "It does enormous damage."

Note to Editors

1. Mrs Povey lives at 53 Tennyson Road, Colne.

2. Pendle Council has a grant scheme to help people like Jean Povey who have problems with deteriorating lead pipes.

For Immediate Release: 26 November 1991

LONDONERS GET TASTE FOR PENDLE LIFE (71/91)

Visitors from .i.Lewisham; Labour Party in South London got a real Lancashire welcome last weekend when they toured the constituency as guests of the local Labour Party.

The 12 strong group of Londoners visited local landmarks including the Clarion House, the market in Colne and the Cross Keys in Barnoldswick where they wrestled with locals in a general knowledge quiz. (The Pendle Team won!)

Ian McKenzie, who organised the trip from the London end, said: "Lewisham is as flat as a pancake and it took a bit of time for us to get used to the ski jump gradients of streets in Colne. But when we got our breath back, we had a great time."

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, said: "It was a good weekend and my thanks go to all the Party members in Pendle who made it such a big success. The Londoners are all looking forward to returning the hospitality in the new year."

ends

For Immediate Release: 27 November 1991

OUTLOOK BLEAK FOR PENDLE JOBLESS ;says Prentice (72/91)

Latest figures for October 1991 show that 2,651 people in Pendle are out of work - up 56% from the same period last year.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, said: "These figures no longer shock or horrify the Tories - if they ever did. That is because .i.unemployment; has been and is being used deliberately as a tool of economic management."

"The human cost of unemployment doesn't appear on the Tory balance sheet." said Prentice.

Note to editors.

1.	October 90	October 91	% change
male	1288	2061	60%
female	414	590	43%
all	1702	2651	56%

2. Long term unemployment (unemployed for over one year) in Pendle stands at 17% of the total (July figures). This is exactly the Great Britain average.

3. There is a serious and growing problem of long term unemployment. Employers discriminate against the long term unemployed. Needs are likely to increase the longer unemployment continues. The longer an individual's unemployment, the more likely it is that he or she will be screened out of consideration for jobs by employers; their experience and skills will be

declining in value; and they are less likely to be referred to jobs by the Employment Service.

For immediate release: 27 November 1991

"FIND ME A HEAD!" challenges Prentice (73/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle has challenged the sitting Tory MP to name a single head teacher or governing body in the constituency in favour of the Government's plans to privatise the .i.school inspectorate;.

Prentice told a meeting in Barnoldswick at the weekend that there had been no consultation with teachers or parents about the proposal and there had certainly been no attempt to canvass local opinion. "Only a confirmed dunce could come up with such a ludicrous policy." said Prentice.

"Our MP last week trooped into the lobbies with the rest of the Tory voting fodder to support a bill that will do untold damage to our schools. The idea that school inspections can be carried out by people who are not professionally qualified to do so beggars belief."

Prentice concluded: "I have written to John Lee challenging him to name a single head teacher or governing body in favour of privatising the inspectorate. If he can find such a person or group of people I would be more than willing to discuss the issue with them in front of parents and the local MP."

ends

For Immediate Release: 27 November 1991

PENDLE 'KICKED IN THE SHIN' says Prentice (74/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has launched a blistering attack on the Government's decision earlier this week to freeze Pendle Council's spending next year. The Government has also pegged the amount of grant it gives to Pendle.

"Pendle isn't a leafy northern version of Hampstead Garden Suburb with a BMW on every corner. It has high levels of unemployment and deprivation and a collapsing industrial base which result directly from this Government's policies. We're not asking for special treatment - only for a fair deal for Pendle from the Government. Yet all we get, year after year, is a kick in the shin."

Prentice continued: "Our local Tory MP is a complete waste of time. After supporting the .i.Poll Tax ;he is in no position to offer advice on any aspect of local government finance. He weakly argued for an increase in the .i.SSA; (the Government's measure of what it thinks Pendle Council should spend in any one year) and was rewarded with an increase a sliver of a fraction above current inflation. (5.02%)

Note to Editors

1. In July each year, the Government decides how much grant it will give to local authorities (the "control total" this year is £41.8 billion)

2. In November each year the Government decides how this money is going to be apportioned between local authorities. This week's Local Government Finance Settlement distributes the Revenue Support Grant and the non domestic rate from businesses and industry.

3. The Government has extended Poll Tax Capping to all councils and not just those with budgets over £15m. Any budget set which is 12.5% above SSA could be capped. Pendle's budget for 91/2 of £9.96m was boosted by the use of balances to about £10.7m. The councils SSA for 1992/3 is £8.9m. This year's spending is already more than 12.5% above SSA.

For Immediate Release: 1 December 1991

"GIVE THE MONEY BACK;" Prentice tells Pendle's Tory MP (75/91)

Labour's Gordon Prentice has renewed his demand for the Tories to hand back the £1.5 million given to them by Mr .i.Asil Nadir;, the disgraced chairman of Polly Peck International who was made bankrupt last week owing personal creditors £90 million. According to The Observer last weekend Nadir faces 77 charges alleging theft of £155 million.

Prentice said: "I have written to Pendle's Tory MP to ask if he thinks it right that the Conservative Party should hang on to £1.5 million of "tainted money" when Nadir's hapless creditors have lost tens of millions.

Prentice continued: "I am absolutely sickened at the way in which the Tories take millions from rich foreigners and people charged with serious criminal offences. Asil Nadir's cash gift of £1.5m works out at £2,369 for every Constituency Conservative Association in Great Britain. And we know from recent press reports that John Latsis, the Greek shipping tycoon, donated £2 million to the Tories earlier this year - equal to £3,159 per constituency in Great Britain. These two cash gifts together amount to £5,528 for every local Conservative Association in the land. This is pretty close to the legal limit that can be spent by the Pendle Conservatives in the forthcoming General Election."

"I want to know from John Lee if he agrees the money should be handed back; if he has any sympathy with Polly Peck's creditors; whether John Latsis expects anything from the Tories in return for his gift and how much of the tainted money has been allocated or promised to Pendle Conservative Association by Conservative Central Office."

Prentice concluded: "It makes my blood boil to see how the Tories get their millions. They have absolutely no shame."

Note to Editors: See the Guardian Saturday Nov 30th (on Latsis gift) and Observer 1 December 1991 on Asil Nadir fraud charges

For Immediate Release: 5 December 1991

"CRUMBLING SCHOOLS" ACCUSATION by Prentice (76/91)

Lancashire's .i.schools; are crumbling away according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice. Local education authorities such as Lancashire have told central government they need £1.6 billion for urgent capital repairs and improvements to state schools but they can expect less than half that with only £686 million earmarked in the Autumn Statement.

Speaking to a meeting of local parents in Brierfield earlier this week, Prentice said: "Here in Lancashire in the current year (91/2) the County needed £36.6 million to tackle dilapidated school buildings but was allocated only £22.7 million - or 62% of the bid. For next year (92/3) the County is bidding for £36.2 million and, if past performance is any guide, will be lucky to get two thirds."

"To add insult to injury, the Tories have spent more on their new Education HQ, Sanctuary Buildings, in Great Smith Street, Westminster than Lancashire County Council was allowed to spend this year on its entire stock of schools. The Department of Education and Science has moved into new luxury offices, complete with atrium and indoor garden when millions of children are forced to study in squalor."

Note to Editors

Sanctuary Buildings cost £13.8 million to fit out and will cost £12.7 million annually in rent. This totals £26.5m compared with Lancashire's capital allocation for the current year of £22.7m

For Immediate Release: 5 December 1991

PRENTICE URGES ACTION ON TEXTILES (77/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, has told local textile workers that a new deal is needed for Pendle's ailing .i.textile industry;.

Speaking to a meeting of trade unionists in Nelson earlier this week, Prentice said: "We have had an avalanche of redundancies and closures here in Pendle and we need a Government ready, willing and able to give the industry the backing it needs."

"Under the Tories, the textile industry has lost thousands of jobs. And the Government is not fighting hard enough to preserve what is left. The Multi Fibre Arrangement has been extended until December 1992 but the Government is reluctant to say what GATT rules they want strengthened or over what time period the MFA should be phased out. The last time Pendle's Tory MP spoke on the textile industry in the House of Commons was on 12 January 1990 when he quoted a number of local firms that "battle away in intensely competitive markets". He mentioned Smith and Nephew where 120 were put on short time working earlier this year. He mentioned Thomas Mason - now about to close. He mentioned Dawes and Company - another 25 job losses. And he mentioned CV Fabrics at Barrowford where in the summer 206 people were given notice of redundancy.

"Labour has argued that the Government must press for a retention of the Multi Fibre Arrangement to give the industry more time to restructure. A

phase out of the MFA would be more acceptable if satisfactory rules can be incorporated in GATT but, in the present state of GATT negotiations, things do not look encouraging. Labour believes that any phase out must be over a period of at least 10 years and preferably up to 15 years. The textile industry is important for the North West and for Pendle and we need a Government that recognises that fact."

ends

Note to Editors

1. The textile and clothing sector employs 426,000 people in Britain and is the fifth largest manufacturing sector. The industry has undergone severe contraction. Between 1979 and 1981 alone over 200,000 jobs were lost..

2. The Multi Fibre Arrangement is a trading agreement that regulates the world trade in textiles. It was established in 1973 as a response to the flood of low cost imports from developing countries and was intended to give the developed countries (mostly of Europe and North America) time to restructure their industries. It has been renewed three times since 1973 and in July 1991 a 17 month extension was negotiated. It expires in December 1992.

3. The MFA, which is permitted as a derogation from the free trade principles of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), limits the growth of imports into the developed countries by setting import quotas on particular products. The EC negotiates as a unit but individual quotas for imports into each country are negotiated.

4. Under the current Uruguay Round of GATT Multilateral Trade Negotiations which are still continuing there has been an attempt to seek an agreement on ways in which textiles and clothing might be progressively integrated into GATT on the basis of strengthened rules and discipline. In this case the MFA would be phased out.

5. One criticism commonly levelled against the MFA is that it discriminates against developing countries by restricting their export potential. But in fact imports into the UK from developing countries and the old centrally planned economies - the countries covered by the MFA - have increased faster than the total growth of imports in the 1980s.

6. The "developing countries" under the MFA art a varied group. They include countries with rapid growth and middle or high income such as Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan. Some of the poorest of the exporting MFA nations such as Lesotho are in favour of the MFA because it allows them to compete with the more advanced countries like South Korea - under the MFA South Korea's exports are limited and Lesotho's are not.

7. If the MFA were abolished without a strengthening of GATT rules the effect on employment in Britain would be catastrophic. Abandoning textile trade regulation would have equally dramatic consequences worldwide. Regulation in textiles does not distort but free world trade - for example by preventing restrictive tariff barriers. Without regulation there would be growing protectionism and ultimately a breakdown in world trade. So the choice is not between free trade and the MFA. It is between protectionism and the MFA.

8. The Labour Party believes that if the MFA were phased out (and we say it should be over a 10 - 15 year period) we would want to see the following changes in GATT:

* Tariff and non tariff barriers: markets should be opened up by reducing a range of barriers

* Subsidies: the worst of subsidies which distort trade should not be allowed

* Dumping: effective anti dumping provisions must be introduced into the GATT rules

* Counterfeiting and patent regulations: theft of designs must be prevented

* Safeguards: a strengthened safeguards clause to act against damaging import surges is essential

* Social clause: a clause to encourage improvements in working conditions would feed the benefits of increased trade through to employees.

9. The Liberal Democrats have said they want to end the MFA by the end of 1991 - if fair trading conditions can be established under GATT. They want special government assistance "to be offered to individuals who might lose their jobs as a result" (Economics for the Future. August 1991. page 15)

For Immediate Release: 3 December 1991

LIB DEM TAX FIGURES DON'T ADD UP says Prentice (78/91)

The confusion over the .i.Liberal Democrats;' .i.Local Income Tax; figures for Pendle is over according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at a meeting of Party workers in Colne earlier this week, Prentice said: "Last April, the Liberal Democrats produced three figures for Pendle which - despite every encouragement from me - they could not reconcile. The Liberal Democrats nationally said Pendle would have a LIT rate of 3.6p in the pound - the joint highest with Rossendale of all 14 Lancashire districts. The local Liberal Democrats claimed a LIT rate of 2.7p in the pound. As I recall, a third figure was given in leaflets circulating in Colne."

"Now the expert who did the number crunching for them, Dr Philip Truscott of Surrey University, has slapped a writ on Paddy Ashdown, accusing the Liberal Democrats of fiddling the figures to make their LIT plans look more attractive to voters than they really are!"

"Truscott - who was a member of the Liberal Democrat Local Government Finance Working Group - has now quit the Party. He has revealed that figures from two of his studies were used selectively to produce the best outcome for each region of Britain. This, he says, has damaged his professional reputation as an academic and author."

"What a sorry state of affairs. The Liberal Democrats have got their sums all wrong. I drew attention to the discrepancies in their local Income Tax figures

seven months ago and was met by a wall of silence from people who usually sound off at the drop of a hat."

"They said nothing at the time and now we know why. When they are not inventing figures they are fiddling them."

ends

To: The Editor
Nelson Leader
11 December 1991

Dear Sir

HISTORY RE-WRITTEN (79/91)

Last Thursday (5 December), I watched - with growing incredulity - the report on the proposed Council Tax on BBC North West Tonight.

The presenter, Winifred Robinson, when introducing Pendle's Tory MP, John Lee, said: "You resigned as Minister for Tourism so you could publicly oppose the Poll Tax".

This invites the question of when, precisely, did John Lee first call for the abolition of the .i.Poll Tax;? When Lee resigned from the Government in July 1989 he did not cite the Poll Tax as the reason. He told the Lancashire Evening Telegraph on 24 July 1989: "I have thought about it for some time and really there are a mix of reasons, not in any particular order (my italics) : a desire to be freer to speak out on constituency matters and spend more time on them; a wish to spend more time with my family after six years as a minister. I have grown very attached to the tourism and hospitality industry and very much want to continue this work, which I can only do by stepping to the back benches."

After his resignation he next spoke in the House of Commons five and a half months later - on 12 January 1990 - not on the Poll Tax but on the Multi Fibre Arrangement.

By my reckoning, John Lee first spoke in the Commons against the Poll Tax on 5 December 1990 - 18 months after his resignation and a full three years after it was first debated in the Commons - when he said that
he and the rest of the Conservative Parliamentary Party were "clubbed and conned" into supporting the "wretched policy". Lee's views about the Poll Tax only turned to rebellion when he realised it was fatally damaging his chances of holding the constituency. He voted against the Revenue Support Grant Settlement for the Poll Tax on 18 January 1990 when it was already clear the tax had next to no public support.

There is no dispute about his earlier support for the Poll Tax. It was MPs like Lee who put it on the statute book. He voted for the principle of the flat rate Poll Tax on 17 December 1987 and against the Michael Mates banding proposal in April 1988. He also voted against extending to student nurses the automatic 80% student rebate.

My dispute with John Lee is not that he changed his mind on the Poll Tax but that it took so long for him to do so. It is manifestly and incontrovertibly the case that Lee did not resign so that he could "publicly oppose the Poll Tax."

My challenge to Lee is to say precisely when he first publicly - and on the record - called for the Poll tax to be abolished. It is a challenge which, for obvious reasons, he will choose to ignore.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice

John Lee MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
10 December 1991

Dear John

I watched your interview on BBC North West Tonight on 5 December with interest. I notice you did not correct the presenter, Winifred Robinson, when she introduced you as the man who "resigned as Minister for Tourism so you could publicly oppose the Poll Tax."

Can I ask when you first made a public statement - on the record - calling for the Poll Tax to be abolished?

I am enclosing a copy of a letter I have sent today to the local press detailing your conversion from staunch supporter of the Poll Tax to one of its opponents.

Yours sincerely

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1991

TELL ME WHEN says Prentice (80/91)

When did Pendle's Tory MP first publicly - and on the record - call for the .i.Poll Tax; to be scrapped?

That's the latest challenge thrown down by John Lee's opposite number, Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice has written to Lee to ask him when he first spoke out against the Poll Tax. The move was prompted by an interview on BBC's North West Tonight which introduced Lee as the man who resigned from the Government to enable him "to publicly oppose the Poll Tax".

Prentice said: "This is something out of an old Norse saga. Pure mythology. Lee was a latter day convert against the Poll Tax but the central mystery remains. When, precisely, did he first call for the Poll Tax to be abolished?"

ends

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1991

PHOTOCALL

JOAN LESTOR MP AND GORDON PRENTICE (81/91)
in Pendle on Saturday 14 December

.i.Joan Lestor MP;, Shadow Minister for Children, will be joining Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, in a walkabout at Colne Market. Joan and Gordon will visit the Labour Party stall at the market at 2.45pm. (Photographers welcome)

At 3.15pm Joan and Gordon will be dropping in to the local Labour Party's Children's Christmas Party at Ambulance Hall, Nelson. (Photographers welcome)

At 3.45pm Joan and Gordon will visit Reedley Cottages, Reedley Hall, Nelson - a community home for handicapped children - to meet Jane Morrow, the Officer in Charge, the staff and children. (Photographers welcome)

ends

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1991

HEALTH CHIEFS' REPORT "INACCURATE AND MISLEADING" says Prentice (82/91)

The simmering row over the decision by Tory Health Secretary, William Waldegrave MP, to give the go ahead for Burnley Health Care to take local hospitals and clinics out of local health authority control has flared up again.

Labour's Gordon Prentice - who has made the .i.health; service a top priority over recent months - has completed a detailed analysis of the responses to the opt out proposal compiled by the North West Regional Health Authority.

Prentice said: "The report is shot through with inaccuracies and misleading information yet this document apparently summarised the views of local people. The response against opt out was overwhelming yet the Secretary of State gave the green light - totally nullifying the consultation exercise."

Prentice continued : "I fully support Burnley Council - supported by our own Council here in Pendle - in pressing for a judicial review of the Government's decision on the grounds that no "reasonable person" could have found in favour of the opt out Trust given the weight of public opinion against the proposal."

"The Regional Health Authority summary is a real rib tickler. Mr Ken Johnstone is listed as a member of the public - yet he is the marketing director of the opt out Burnley Health Care Trust! The report states that the Burnley Pendle and Rossendale District Health Authority is unanimously in favour of opt out yet Frank Chadwick - a health

authority member - is resolutely against the proposal. His comments were included in the wrong category. This is also the case for leading medical

people whose views have been totally distorted. The whole exercise is totally fraudulent."

ends

Note to editors

1. The legal procedure of judicial review allows the Courts to question executive (government) action and to set it aside if, as in this case, it results in a decision which no reasonable person could have reached taking into account all the evidence.

2. The following information is reproduced from my Press Release of 15 October 1991. It demonstrates the extent of medical opinion against the Trust proposal. In the whole area of the Burnley Pendle and Rossendale District Health Authority, the official consultation on the opt out proposals - organised by the North West Regional Health Authority - brought forward 20 representations in support of opt out and 3,162 against.

3. Those supporting opt out included : 3 District Health Authorities; 1 FHSA; 1 group of GPs; 1 member of staff; 1 staff group; 2 Conservative local authorities; the Blackburn Conservative Group of Councillors; 1 MP (Winston Churchill); 1 Health Worker ; three Trusts and 5 members of the general public.

4. The Regional Health Authority created a third category of responses which were classified as "unclear". These included submissions from Dr David Thistlewaite, a consultant paediatrician, who said "A Trust can determine for itself what it provides and what it does not; that care need not be comprehensive...This application has gone ahead without consultants being involved in its compilation hence important clinical implications have not been addressed."

Dr Patterson, a consultant physician at Burnley General, said: "I am writing to oppose (Dr Patterson's underlining) the application of Burnley Health Care to become an NHS Trust. The recent ballot of the consultant medical staff showed the application does not have the support of medical staff despite the application document giving the impression the medical staff were in agreement. Trust status will do nothing for patient care.

Mr I. W. Mahady, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and Chairman of the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Medical Staff Committee wrote: "The vast majority of consultant opinion is against Trust status for Burnley Health care. It is extremely distressing to find that the administration of Burnley Health Care have taken little notice of Consultant Opinion and are proceeding in their application for Trust Status.

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1991

£1,293 + £508 = TORY FIDDLING says Prentice (83/91)

The Government's grant to Pendle Council next year will be £508 per adult compared with £1,077 in Tory controlled Wandsworth and £1,293 in Tory controlled City of Westminster according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice said: "No wonder the Tories in the well off London Boroughs of Wandsworth and Westminster can set low Poll Taxes when they've got the Government pumping money into their coffers as if there is no tomorrow. If Pendle had the same level of support no-one would need to pay .i.Poll Tax; at all!"

Prentice, who was speaking to a meeting of Party workers in Nelson last weekend slated Pendle's Tory MP for peddling half truths when describing the Government's financial support for Pendle Council. "The Council is facing an impossible job in just balancing its books next year. And for our MP to say limply that "Pendle's settlement is, in fact, better than the majority of other districts in Lancashire" (Leader page 20 29/11/91) is to completely miss the point. In many respects our problems here in Pendle are more severe than elsewhere."

"Most Lancashire councils have been given a spending target next year which is less than inflation. In Pendle's case, it is a smidgeon above but the grant settlement takes no account of the Council's use of balances this year to protect and maintain services. The result is not a 'tough but fair' settlement but a disastrous one."

"What really makes my blood boil is all this 'tough but fair' drivel we get from our Tory MP. Every time he says that, I think about Pendle's £508 grant per adult and the £1,077 Wandsworth hand out or the monstrous £1,293 to the City of Westminster. It is tough for some and tender for others."

Prentice concluded: "Our MP is asking us to dance in the streets over the extra support for the police but here in Lancashire it amounts to an extra 4 (four) police officers next year for the entire County. I bet that has the burglars trembling!"

Note to Editors

1. The SSA (Standard Spending Assessment) is the Government's measure of what every Council needs to spend in order to provide a standard level of service across the country. Councils that spend above their .i.SSA; are penalised. All Councils can now be capped.

2. The Government provides Revenue Support Grant (RSG) to all Councils and Area Protection Grant (APG) to a few such as Pendle that have been hard hit in the changeover to the Poll Tax. The Grant per adult is calculated simply by dividing the number of adults in Pendle (61,821) into the RSG (and APG where applicable).

3. The figures below show the grant per head for every district council in Lancashire - before and after APG.

	% increase in SSA 91/2 to 92/3	Government Grant £ per adult	Government Grant £ per adult before APG
Blackburn	2.1	£513	£512
Blackpool	-1.7	£453	
Burnley	7.6	£535	£484
Chorley	5.6	£411	

Fylde	4.7	£414	
Hyndburn	3.8	£488	£450
Lancaster	3.1	£443	
PENDLE	5.1	£508	£452
Preston	.009	£489	
Ribble Valley	.042	£404	
Rossendale	.054	£469	£428
South Ribble	6.3	£401	
West Lancs	1.0	£412	
Wyre	2.6	£414	
Lancashire	6.8		

4. Figures from Hansard 28 November 1991

For Immediate Release 18 December 1991

"A GOOD BREAK, WITH A FEW HOLES OF GOLF AND A LITTLE FISHING' (84/91)

Labour's Gordon Prentice has fired another broadside in his continuing war of statistics with Pendle's Conservative MP, John Lee. This time, Prentice has taken aim at the MP's voting record in the House of Commons. "It leaves a lot to be desired" says Prentice.

"When Lee resigned from the Government in July 1989, he told the Lancashire Evening Telegraph that he was looking forward to "a good break, with a few holes of golf and a little fishing." It turned into a rather extended break. After his resignation it was five and a half months before he again spoke in the House of Commons."

A detailed analysis of Lee's .i.voting record; from October to December 1989 revealed that out of 114 divisions in the Commons, Lee was absent on 75 occasions. He voted in 39 - one in three.

Prentice continued: "Although Lee was frequently absent from Parliament during this period, he did turn out to support the Government on all the big votes. This also proved to be the pattern in 1990. I dare say his business and other interests kept him away from Parliament."

Note to Editors

1. A dossier on Lee's voting record from January 1990 to date is being compiled for release in the New Year - along with a "Factsheet" on Lee's position on the Poll Tax and its successor - the Council Tax.

For Immediate Release:17 December 1991

'SCROOGE' JIBE AT LIBERAL DEMOCRATS (85/91)

Labour's Gordon Prentice has hit out at the .i.Liberal Democrat;'s call to end the 20% minimum contribution to the .i.Poll Tax; - so long as a corresponding

reduction is made in income support. "Even the Tory Government hasn't been that mean" says Prentice.

"This is yet another example of the cock-eyed ideas we are used to getting from the Liberal Democrats. This proposal has been put forward by none other than the Leader of the Liberal Democrats on the Association of District Councils supported by the Liberal Democrat Leaders on the Association of County Councils and London Boroughs Association."

"Most sensible people want to get rid of the iniquitous 20% rule - but no-one other than the Liberal Democrats has suggested scrapping it and then docking the same amount from Income Support."

"There must have been a full moon when they thought of that one" said Prentice.

Note to Editors

1. The Tories new Council Tax makes provision for 100% rebates. However, the 20% minimum Poll Tax contribution is to continue until April 1993 when the Poll Tax is scrapped.

2. Labour has consistently argued for the abolition of the 20% rule. Labour would replace the Poll Tax with Fair Rates - a local tax related to ability to pay.

For Immediate Release: 17 December 1991

IT'S COLD COMFORT says Prentice (86/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, told a meeting of pensioners in Nelson this week that a cold snap in Lancashire could leave many local people with blue lips and chattering teeth.

"The Tory Government's record on insulation and energy efficiency ranges from neglect to obstruction" said Prentice. "In 1979 over one million homes were insulated under the Energy Conservation Programme and Homes .i.Insulation; Scheme. By 1989, when the Government stopped collecting these figures, the number had dropped to just 74,000. If this Government had kept up the rate they inherited from Labour, over 5.7 million more homes would have been insulated. Here in the North West, 334,000 more homes would have been insulated.

Prentice continued: "The Government is spending just £24m this year on the Homes Energy Efficiency Scheme. Yet they have launched a £10m publicity campaign on energy efficiency to con people into believing the Government is taking the issue seriously!"

Note to Editors

The incoming Labour Government will give top priority to energy saving. We will require the electricity and gas industries to invest in insulating people's homes and promote energy efficient appliances. Domestic appliances will

carry energy labels. We will reduce VAT on materials used in insulation and lagging. Labour's house building programme will mean extra investment to insulate new and renovated homes.

For Immediate Release :12 December 1991

PRENTICE ACCUSES MP OF HYPOCRISY (87/91)

In his most direct attack so far, Labour's outspoken Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, has accused sitting MP John Lee of hypocrisy.

The proposed new Council Tax - which the Government plans to introduce in April 1993 to replace the .i.Poll Tax;. - provided the touch paper that ignited Prentice's charge of hypocrisy. The new tax will have 8 bands - reflecting the value of properties - and the amount householders will pay will be determined by the band into which their house falls.

Prentice told a meeting of Party members in Colne that Pendle's Tory MP had made a political career out of weeping crocodile tears for his constituency. "Lee called for a lower starting band for the new Tax reflecting the large number of properties in the constituency clustered in the lowest band. Typically, his views were ignored by the Government, yet when an amendment was proposed by the Labour Party in the Commons - which would directly benefit his constituents and which was in line with his earlier call - he voted against. How can anyone take this man seriously?" asked Prentice.

"In the forthcoming General Election I don't want to hear any claptrap about our MP safeguarding the position of his Pendle constituents - or, indeed, that his is an influential voice in the Commons. Both assertions - on the evidence I have to hand - are frankly preposterous."

ends

Note to Editors over page
1. In Pendle 50% of all properties lie in the band A - the lowest band. Half the households in the constituency will be paying exactly the same.

Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
Under £40,000	£40K - £52K	£52 - £68	£68K - £88K	£88K - £120K	£120K - £160	£160K - £320K	over £320K
50%	18%	17%	11%	2%	1%	1%	neg

2. The proposed Labour Amendment to the Local Government Finance Bill (Council Tax Bill) at Report Stage on 16 December sought to introduce a new lower band A in the North West for properties valued up to £30,000. Band B would run from £30,000 to £40,000 and so on.

3. With this kind of tax, the fewer bands the greater the danger of properties being clustered in a small number of bands (as in Pendle). The most extreme example would be a tax with one band where someone living in the largest and most luxurious house would pay the same as someone living in the smallest - a real Property Poll Tax.. For their Council Tax, the Tories toyed with 14 bands, then 9 bands, then 7 and, finally, settled on 8. Although there are 8 bands, those living in top band houses will never pay more than three times the tax of those in the lowest band.

4. Under the Council Tax, the richest person in the City of Westminster (on Band H) will, on the Government's own figures (April 1991) pay less than the poorest person in Pendle (living in a Band A house).

5. On 23 July 1991 in the debate on the Local Government Finance Settlement for 1992/3, Lee said: "I take a certain interest in the replacement of the Community Charge by the Council Tax. I believe that the new higher band is morally right. Will my hon friend also consider whether a new lower starting band would be more realistic for low value areas of the country such as Pendle and NE Lancashire? The Secretary of State, Michael Heseltine, told Lee there would be no lower band.

6. On 5 December 1990. Lee complained that he had been clubbed and conned into supporting the Poll Tax. Yet , on 6 November 1991, Lee voted to guillotine debate on the Council Tax. This week, it completed all its Commons Stages and it now goes into the Lords. One of Lee's Conservative MP colleagues said (of the .i.Council Tax; Committee Stage timetable) on 12 November 1991: "It will be impossible within this 3 week period for there to be any proper consultations with interested parties...It will be a complete abortion and distortion of the way in which Parliament ought to consider a complicated piece of legislation."

For Immediate Release: 19 December 1991

FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT SOARS IN PENDLE (88/91)

Unemployment amongst women in Pendle has shot up by a staggering 43% in the year to October 1991. There are now 590 women out of work compared with 414 a year ago.

In the North West overall, female .i.unemployment; is up 17% in Labour constituencies and 27% in Conservative.

The figures, released this week by Labour's Gordon Prentice confirm earlier predictions that unemployment is certain to be a key issue in next year's General Election.

Prentice said: "John Major told the House of Commons last week following his trip to Maastricht "I was not prepared to put British jobs on the line..." But what on earth has he been doing in Pendle for the pst year - just that!"

ends

Note to Editors

1. Unemployment figures for November will be published on 19 December

2. The Labour Party will be launching a new campaign early in the new year on Women and the Labour Market, Women and Training and Women and the Social Charter.

3. Unemployment amongst women in the UK has increased by 87% from June 79 - June 91.

4. Female unemployment in Europe - from June 90 to June 91 - is nowhere near British levels. In Belgium (+4%). Denmark (+8%), Germany (-16%), Spain (-3%), France (+5%), Ireland (+12%), Italy (-2%), Portugal (-8%) and the UK (+32%).

For Immediate Release: 23 December 1991

PRENTICE SUPPORTS BAN ON LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CHEATS (89/91)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle has come out strongly in support of the High Court ruling last week (20 December) to ban from holding office seven Liberal Democrat councillors in Tower Hamlets who produced a fake Labour Party leaflet during the 1990 local elections in London.

Prentice commented: "The Liberal Democrats - and the Liberals before them - have long been regarded as the dirty tricks experts in British politics. Their favoured tactic is to denounce the Tories and Labour for indulging in yah-boo politics and then go on to make wild and inflammatory statements themselves. Political debate should be based on verifiable facts - not the fevered imaginings favoured by the Liberal Democrats."

"The Liberal Democrats are masters of misrepresentation - elevating smear and innuendo to a form of high art. The .i.Tower Hamlets; judgment has at last delivered justice to the people of Tower Hamlets who, for so long, had to put up with the gutter tactics of the pavement politicians."

Note to Editors

1. Reports of the judgement were carried in the Independent, The Guardian and the Times on 21 December 1991.

2. The Independent reported: "Before the May 1990 elections (in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets), Liberals circulated 5,000 copies of a leaflet - complete with Labour red rose logo - which said that, if elected, Labour would double rents, encourage squatting, rehouse homeless Bangladeshis only, and stop council house repair work. The name of the Liberal election agent, Barrie Duffey, was in small type down the side of the leaflet, which was distributed in three marginal wards.... In a reserved judgement... the High Court ordered the election court to re-convene forthwith and disbar the seven councillors from office for a "corrupt practice which impeded free expression of the franchise by a fraudulent device".

For Immediate Release: 21 January 1991

PRENTICE SPARKS NEW ELECTRICITY ROW (1/92)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has blown a fuse over .i.Norweb;'s latest profits.

The privatised electricity industry scooped £1,059m profits in the six months to September 1991. The profits in the second half of the year, which includes the winter months, are expected to be much higher.

Norweb's profits went up six fold to £33.4m - that is equal to £17.66 profit per domestic customer in just six months. The higher profits followed on from higher prices in April - domestic customers had to fork out 7.26p per unit - a 9% increase. That was on top of Standing Charges totalling £20.88. These were up 18% - the highest jump in England.

Prentice stormed: "These figures are a scandal. The biggest single item in the cost of electricity is the cost of coal. But the price of coal has fallen while Norweb's prices have soared by 32%. Electricity privatisation has got completely out of hand. When so many families have to scrimp and save Norweb are coining it. There is neither real competition nor proper regulation. Electricity privatisation is a legalised racket. The customers are overcharged and the bosses are overpaid." Ů

For Immediate Release: 21 January 1991

HATTERSLEY COMES TO TOWN (2/92)

Labour is wheeling out the big guns in its energetic campaign to recapture super marginal Pendle from the Tories.

The Party's Deputy Leader, .i.Roy Hattersley;, will be visiting the constituency on Friday 7 February calling at local firm .i.Wardle Storeys; in Earby before doing a whistle-stop tour of the Borough with Labour's Westminster hopeful Gordon Prentice.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, said: "I am delighted to have Roy visit the area and see at first hand what the problems are. An incoming Labour Government is going to give Pendle and the North West top priority so it is important for him to meet as many local people as possible and hear their concerns."

Note to Editors

Roy Hattersley is the latest in a long line of senior Labour politicians to visit Pendle in recent months in support of Gordon Prentice. The list includes John Prescott MP, Robin Cook MP, Joan Lestor MP, Margaret Beckett MP, Gordon Brown MP, Tony Blair MP, Tony Lloyd MP, Doug Henderson MP, David Blunkett MP.

For Immediate Release: 21 January 1991

PENDLE'S TORY MP DECLINES TO MEET THE VOTERS (3/92)

Pendle's Tory MP is running away from his constituents according to his Labour opponent, Gordon Prentice.

The jibe from Prentice followed an invitation to the candidates from the major political parties from Granada Television to be filmed chatting informally to a typical Pendle family - selected by .i.Granada TV; as representative of the constituency.

Prentice said: "They were on the look-out for a family "with no party political affiliations" who wanted to chat informally to the candidates of the main political parties and quiz them on anything under the sun.

Now our Tory MP has pulled the rug out from under the TV people and because he says no Granada's plans have had to be scuppered. What on earth is he afraid of?

Prentice concluded: "This action speaks volumes. Our Tory MP is happiest when he is dodging the issues. When he is pictured in the press swinging a golf-club. But give him the opportunity to speak to his constituents on TV and he disappears into his bunker as quick as Jack Flash!"

Note to Editors

1. Pendle is in the cockpit of TV and radio coverage of the General Election. The count is to be covered live by the BBC and independent television.

2. The prestigious BBC Radio 4 Today programme has invited Gordon Prentice - as the likely new MP for Pendle - to join the election analysis programme at 10am - 11am on the morning after the election

For Imediate Release: 21 January 1991

PRENTICE HITS OUT AT HIGH TAX TORIES (4/92)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has come out fighting in the controversy over Labour's .i.tax ;plans. Prentice claims the tax burden imposed by the Tories has never been higher and that they are the high tax party.

Speaking to a meeting of Party supporters in Vivary Bridge last weekend, Prentice said: "The Tory attacks on labour's tax plans are entirely bogus. We have been open and honest about our intentions and our policy has been set out in publicly available documents for more than three years."

"If Norman Lamont cannot even get his own forecasts of the economy right how can people believe him when he makes up numbers about Labour's tax policies. The Tory Party says it will look after public services, cut the basic rate of income tax top 20p in the pound, cut inheritance tax for the richest 5% of the population and keep spending money on unfair policies such as tax relief for private medical insurance. They seem to think they can spend the same pound twice!"

Note to Editors

1. The Tory commitment to cut income tax to 20p in the £ will cost £30 billion. That is £30 billion less to spend on public investment.

2. Although the Tory Party says they have given tax cuts the reality is very different. Income tax only accounts for about one quarter of what the Government raise in taxes. The Tories put up VAT from 8% to 15% and the in the last Budget to 17.5%. The main rate of national insurance contributions was increased from 6.5 to 9%. And they introduced the Poll
Tax. The fact is that people on average and low incomes pay more tax than in 1978/9. The Labour Party is honest about its tax proposals, the Tories are not. The Tories will raise VAT after the election as they have done in the past. They will not even rule out abolishing the national insurance ceiling which they attack us for.

3. the proportion of our national; income taken in tax has risen from 34.75% in 78/9 to 37% in 91/2. A married couple on typical earnings paid out 30.9% of their income in taxes in 78/9. They now pay 34.9%

4. Labour's Policy on National Insurance and Taxation. Our policy is to remove the upper limit on .i.national insurance; contributions (from April 1992, £405 per week equivalent to £21,060 per year) so that those earning above the limit pay national insurance contributions on the same basis as the 88% of people earning below it.

5. Labour is also committed to a new top rate of 50p for those earning substantially above £30,000 per year.

6. There will be no change in the standard rate of income tax (25p).

7. The revenue raised by these proposals more than covers the cost of raising retirement .i.pensions ;by £8 per week for a married couple and £5 per week for a single person and of restoring the real value of child benefit for every child (to £9.95 per week from April 1992).

8. The precise implementation of these changes in taxation and national insurance will, of course, be a matter for the judgment of the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budgets. In each of our three major policy documents we have explicitly maintained the desirability of introducing changes as gradually as possible, without in any way disguising our objectives (see below).

9. Our proposals have been constantly misrepresented by the Tories whose wild claims have been described as "ludicrous" and "absurd" by, amongst others, the Economist and the Independent and the Director of the Institute of Fiscal Studies. What the Tories are most anxious to obscure are the following facts about Labour's policies:

* 88% of earners (ie all of those below the present ceiling on national insurance contributions) would be completely unaffected by changes in either income taxation or national insurance contributions.

* seven million families will gain from the increases in child benefit from the beginning of the Labour Government

* Ten million retirement pensioners will gain from increases in retirement pensions from the beginning of the Labour Government.

"At all stages in reforming the tax and social insurance systems we will ensure that changes are made gradually and in ways which limit the impact on personal incomes..." (Meet the Challenge, Make the Change 1989 p33

"At all stages in reforming the tax and social insurance systems we will ensure that changes are carefully phased in so as to cushion the impact on personal incomes." (Looking to the Future 1990 p 9)

"Fundamental tax reforms of the kind we propose must be introduced gradually so that family and business budgets are not disrupted". Opportunity Britain 1991 p14).

Not sent. MP refuses to talk to voters sent instead

For Immediate Release: 21 January 1991

"FIND A FAMILY" hunt by Granada TV (5/92)

.i.Granada TV; has hit on a novel way to profile the candidates standing for the Pendle constituency in the forthcoming General Election.

They are on the look-out for a family "with no party political affiliations" who would like to chat informally to the candidates of the main political parties and quiz them on anything under the sun.

The Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat candidates have all agreed to take part in the grilling which will be broadcast as soon as the date of the General Election is announced.

Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, said: "I think this is a great idea from Granada TV - allowing people to see the candidates in a relaxed atmosphere chatting to a typical Pendle family."Û

Note to Editors

1. Pendle is in the cockpit of TV and radio coverage of the General Election. The count is to be covered live by the BBC and independent television.

2. The prestigious BBC Radio 4 Today programme has invited Gordon Prentice - as the likely new MP for Pendle - to join the election analysis programme at 10am - 11am on the morning after the election

For Immediate Release: 28 January 1992

LANCASHIRE ENGULFED BY RISING CRIME says Prentice (6/92)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has released figures showing "a rising tide of lawlessness" throughout the eighties.

Prentice told Party supporters in Colne earlier this week that the latest Tory crack-down on .i.crime; amounted to four additional police officers for the whole of Lancashire.

"Official figures show that during the Tory years there has been a relentless increase in crime. From 1978 to September 1991 reported crimes in Lancashire more than doubled. The figures shot up from 54,387 notifiable offences to 119,262 - an increase of 119%.."

"Last year* crime in the County rose 12.5%. The so called Party of law and order has presided over a crime wave of unprecedented severity" said Prentice.

Note to Editors

* the % increase in recorded crime between year ending September 1990 and year ending September 1991.

Letter for publication Liberal Democrats and Council Tax (7/92)

The Editor, Nelson Leader

28 January 1992

Dear Sir

The .i.Liberal Democrats; have challenged me to explain why Labour is against the proposed "single person discounts" which are a central feature of the new .i.Council Tax ;- the Tories' alternative to the Poll Tax.

The Tories want to give every single person a discount of 25% on their Council Tax Bill. The Liberal Democrats want to give every single person a 50% discount. The Labour Party believes that the discount principle is fundamentally and irredeemably unfair. On the Government's own figures a millionaire living in a mansion could easily pay less than a low income couple, living just above rebate level, living in modest accommodation.

We believe the income foregone by granting discounts (which amounts to £1 billion in the case of the Liberal Democrats 50% proposal) could be better directed at income related rebates. It should be targetted to where it is most needed.

In Pendle, a hard pressed couple with children, with an income just above rebate level, living in a house worth £40,000 (in Band B) would have paid £402 in Council Tax in 1991/2 had the tax been up and running then. Under the Tory scheme, a single person regardless of his or her income living in a house worth £88,000 (Band D) would pay £387 - £15 less. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposal that very same single person would pay £258 - or £144 less.

The Labour Party believes taxation should be related to ability to pay. It cannot be right, for example, that Michael Heseltine, the millionaire Secretary of State for the Environment, should pay only £227 for his
luxurious Belgravia mansion while a struggling couple living just above income support level in the tiniest terraced house in Pendle would pay £344 - or £117 more! Where is the fairness and equity in such a system?

Finally, I allow myself a wry smile when I read the Liberal Democrats say that their local income tax proposals are "fair and workable". I am still waiting for an explanation of the three different figures for Pendle's LIT that were published in different documents just before last year's local elections.

Their "challenges" to me will carry little weight unless and until they can make their own figures stand detailed scrutiny.

Yours etc
Gordon Prentice

Note to Editors

The Council Tax figures quoted for Pendle are illustrative. They were published by the Government on April 24 1991 and show the Council Tax that would have been paid in the current year (91-92) had it been up and running.

For Immediate Release: 28 January 1992

WINNING IN THE NORTH WEST" (8/92)

PHOTOCALL

Labour Leader, .i.Neil Kinnock; MP, will be unveiling Labour;'s programme for the North West at 10.35am on Friday 31 January at the World Trade Centre, Exchange Quay, Trafford Road Salford.

He will be joined by Pendle's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, and other Labour PPCs from the region.

Prentice said: "The North West, which has been so badly neglected by the Tories for the past 13 years, will be a top priority for the next Labour Government. Neil will be spelling out what Labour's policies will mean for the North West and what we shall be doing to get the region back on its feet. No other part of Britain needs a Labour Government more than we do" said Prentice.

Note to Editors

Media welcome from 10am - 11.30
Address by Neil Kinnock from 10.35 - 10.55.

For Immediate Release: 28 January 1992

POLL TAX SHOCK FOR PENDLE says Prentice (9/92)

Pendle's .i.Poll Tax; is to shoot up by almost 20% - thanks to the Government's decision to end the special grant it gave the Council last year in an attempt to dampen local fury about sky high bills.

The forecast comes from Labour's Gordon Prentice who says the inflation busting increase is the direct responsibility of the Tory Government. Prentice told the Nelson Leader that the Government's move was a typical Tory sleight of hand. "Giving money with one hand and taking it back with the other. They're professional magicians."

A furious row has erupted over the withdrawal of the so-called "Area Protection Grant" - money given to Pendle and a handful of other hard- hit local authorities last year to cushion the impact of the Poll Tax. Pendle received £1.6m which works out at £25 per person.

Prentice said: "That £25 is to be snatched away by the Tory Government and loaded on to the coming year's Poll Tax. This year's bill was £218 but from April Poll Tax is likely to zoom to about £259 - a £41 increase of which £25 is a direct result of the grant cut. Despite all their efforts to persuade us otherwise, the hated Poll Tax is still alive and with us. They have yet to drive a stake through its heart."

ends

Note to Editors

1. Pendle's Poll Tax will be set on 3 March but the Council will take a preliminary view on the likely level on 12 February.

2. Local Government is financed basically in three ways. By the Revenue

Poll Tax Shock for PendlE says Prentice

Support Grant (determined by the Government); by the Uniform Business Rate (determined by the Government) and by the Poll Tax (largely determined by the Government now that the spending of all councils is "capped" to the level the Government thinks is appropriate). However, Poll Tax bills can be inflated by

- withdrawal of the Area Protection Grant (as has happened to Pendle) and

- the level of non payment.

3. Labour Councils are and have been making strenuous efforts to collect the Poll Tax. Their job has been made more difficult than need be because the Government has refused to abolish the rule which obliges the very poorest people on income support to pay 20% of their bill. Chasing up these people costs £15 for every £6 brought in - this is because the sums involved are relatively small and require a disproportionate effort to collect.

4. In March 1991, the Prime Minister, John Major, said the Poll Tax was "fatally flawed and increasingly uncollectable."

5. The Tory Government has planned for the Poll Tax to be with us until April 1993 even though the Tories like to pretend it has somehow disappeared. John Major said in October last year "There were problems that were causing us (ie the Tory Party) some division a year or so ago; the Community Charge was one. We have abolished that." (quoted in the Financial Times 5 Oct 91). That statement is inaccurate as the 92/3 Poll Tax bills will testify.

For Immediate Release: 28 January 1992

TORY 'BOMBSHELL' POSTERS HAS LABOUR EXPLODING (10/92)

The Conservative "Bombshell" posters which claim a Labour Government would cost people an extra £1,000 a year in tax have been denounced as a lie by the man bidding to become Pendle's next MP. Over the past fortnight the posters have been appearing on prominent billboard sites in the constituency.

An angry Gordon Prentice told concerned pensioners in Nelson earlier this week that the poster showed a complete disregard for the truth. "For the Tories to claim that the election of a Labour Government would cost most people in Britain - let alone Pendle - £1,000 in extra .i.tax ;is a lie. They know it and we know it."

Prentice continued: "The lie is bare-faced and blatant but what struck me most was the nerve of it all. For the Tories, who wasted £14 billion on the Poll Tax and who made history by introducing and then abolishing the same tax in a single Parliament, this demonstrates bare faced cheek. They said they wouldn't raise VAT but they did. From 8% to 15% and then, last year, to 17.5%. I predict they'll raise it to 22% if they were ever returned in an election."

"Any Tory MP with an ounce of integrity would repudiate the bombshell ad. The fact is the Tories have already lobbed their own bombshell into Pendle - the Poll Tax. It exploded and produced a lot of casualties" said Prentice.

ends

For Immediate Release: 3 February 1992

MP's HOLIDAY FIRM SACKS MORE PEOPLE (11/92)

The Earby based firm .i.Country Holidays; has sacked a further 11 employees in a move blamed on "the uncertain state of the British economy".

The firm which is run by Pendle's Tory MP, John Lee, sacked 90 employees last February citing the Gulf War as the main reason for the down turn in business.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, commented: "My immediate concern is for the people who have been made redundant but what is happening to our MP's business is happening to thousands of other firms across Britain."

"Our MP regularly calls for Government aid to help boost the tourism industry and now we know why. His company is on the ropes thanks to the deep recession the Tories have plunged us into."

Note to Editors

1. The Group Marketing Director, Peter Chappelow, told the Craven Herald on 31 January 1992: "...People seem to be dithering a bit about their holidays. We can't say for sure when this uncertainty will end, so in the meantime we have had to take steps to prune our overheads wherever we could without killing the company."

2. The Guardian predicts that the figures for the 1991 GDP - due out on February 20 - will show the economy shrank by almost 2.5% last year, the steepest decline for 60 years. (Lead article, 3 February 1991)

For Immediate Release: 3 February 1992

ARCHITECT OF POLL TAX COMES TO PENDLE (12/92)

The visit to Pendle last week by Tory Employment Secretary and architect of the .i.Poll Tax;, .i.Michael Howard MP;, has been condemned by Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice told a meeting of the local Labour Party in Colne last weekend that Howard's presence in the constituency was a stark reminder of the havoc wreaked by the Poll Tax in Pendle.

Prentice asked: "Who on earth invited him anyway? Our Tory MP? After Thatcher herself, this man had the most direct responsibility for introducing the Poll tax. To have him here - the home of the "Pendle Factor" - is to add insult to injury. The Tories must think we've all got the memories of sparrows."

"After the disaster of the Poll Tax, Howard is applying his skills to the employment portfolio. He says unemployment in the North West is under control but who believes that? On the day of his visit to Pendle, Rumbelows sacked 800 people, British Coal decided to close Bickershaw colliery with the loss of 620 jobs and Granada TV shed 100 jobs. And to cap it all, Pendle's Tory MP sacked 11 people from his holiday firm."

"The Tories have the idea they can cling to power by blanketing out the past. It's a strategy that's bound to fail. People aren't stupid" said Prentice.

ends

Note to Editors

1. Michael Howard was the Minister for Local Government and, as such, primarily responsible for getting the Poll Tax on to the Statute Book. In October 1987 he announced that Poll Tax capping would be part of the new system of local government.

2. In April 1988 he announced that Poll Tax arrears, run up by the very poorest people in our community, would be deducted from DHSS benefits.

3. He is on record as saying that property taxes are unfair. He told the Financial Times on 16 November 1987: "A property tax is not a fair tax... so we must abolish the local property tax.

4. Manufacturing jobs have been lost at the rate of 34 an hour since 1979. Department of Employment statistics showed that 2,387,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared. More than any job gains in the Service sector.

Number 14/92
For Immediate Release: 11 February 1992

PRENTICE RIDICULES TORY CLAIM THAT THE NORTH - SOUTH DIVIDE "NO LONGER EXISTS" (14/92)

The claim by Pendle's Tory MP that "the North South divide no longer exists as an issue" has been dubbed "pure moonshine" by his Labour opponent, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice told a meeting of Party supporters in Trawden earlier this week: "This is further confirmation that our Tory MP lives on another planet - most probably, the far side of the moon. From that position he would be quite unable to see North East Lancashire or, indeed, the South East of England."

Prentice continued: Prentice concluded: "The North South divide no longer exists in our Tory MP's imagination. For everyone else it is a reality."

ends

Note to Editors

1. Copy of John Lee's speech in the Commons on 6 February is attached.

2. Official figures on the standard regions of the UK are published by HMSO annually in Regional Trends and Social Trends. The figures quoted in this release are from these publications and from the Guardian of 20 January 1992 which covered the North West in a series of articles.

3. Average Poll Tax per person 1991

South East	£368
North West	£377

Source: Regional Trends 1991 Table 2.2

4. Young people staying on in education (1989)

South East	72%
North West	67%

Source Regional Trends 1991

5. Death Rate per 1,000 population

South East	10.6
North West	12.2

Source Regional Trends 1991 table 4.10

6. Increase in market value of housing stock

South East	181%
North West	70%

Source: Regional Trends 1991 table 5.6

7. Car ownership 1989. Households with no car.

South East	30%
North West	38%

Source Social Trends 1992 Table 13.8

8. Cars per 1,000 population

South East	391
North West	327

Source Regional Trends 1991

9. Distribution of income 1988-9

	% of households under £60 per week	% over £60 but under £80 per week	% over £80 but under £125 per week
South East	7.4%	5.4%	9.0%
North West	11.4%	7.4%	13.1%

Source Regional Trends 1991 Table 11.2

10. Figures on personal disposable income from the Guardian book "The Election" (page 101) which quotes Regional Trends

Number 15/92
Embargoed: 13 February 1992

PENDLE'S JOBLESS DOUBLES SINCE 1979 says Prentice (15/92)

Unemployment in Pendle has more than doubled since the Tories came to power in 1979 according to Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice.

A Labour party survey released today shows that in the eighty most marginal Tory held constituencies, Pendle lies 38th when ranked by the % change in unemployment between 1979 and 1991.

In December 1979 there were 1,286 unemployed claimants and this jumped to 2,684 by December 1991 - a 109% increase.

Prentice commented: "Michael Howard, the Employment Secretary who visited us recently - has seen unemployment rise 110% in his own Folkestone and Hythe constituency. And that is somehow supposed to make everyone in the North West feel better about things. What the Tories have given us is equality of misery with soaring unemployment blighting the entire country."

"The latest news from British Aerospace knocks the stuffing out of Tory claims that the economy is picking up. We've heard it all before from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the rest of them. We were told of the "vague stirrings"

of recovery. The "green shoots of spring". It was all wishful thinking" said Prentice.

PENDLE'S JOBLESS DOUBLES

Note to Editors

1. The figures have been compiled by Henry McLeish MP and represent the first ever analysis of unemployment over the entire period of office of the present Government. It charts unemployment on a constituency by constituency basis over the period December 1979 - December 1991. The analysis has been undertaken by the House of Commons Library statistical section using their won model, devised at the Labour Party's request.

2. The significance of the analysis is that it is a commentary upon the entire period of office of the Conservatives. In addition to having created a divided society and an unprecedented rise in poverty, the Conservatives - supposedly the Party of sound economic management - have squandered £100 billion of North Sea Oil revenues and £30 billion of privatisation receipts and still will leave office with unemployment over double the level at which it stood when they took office in 1979.

Number 17/92

For Immediate Release: 12 February 1992

LABOUR PLEDGE TO MODERNISE BRITAIN'S SCHOOLS

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, told Labour councillors at the Party's Local Government Conference in Blackpool last weekend that modernising Britain's schools would be a top priority for the incoming Labour Government.

Prentice said: "The Tories have neglected our schools to such an extent that for many parents there is no longer any such thing as a free state education. Tory claims that the education service has been properly funded are simply not true. If they were, schools across the country would not have to scrimp and scavenge for essential books and equipment."

"If the Tories were to be given a fourth term the situation would undoubtedly get worse. Schools in prosperous areas would be forced to rely more and more on fundraising, while those in poorer areas would be forced to lower standards as they became starved of cash. After 13 years of Tory experiments on our children's education Britain needs stability in the classroom and an end to expensive gimmicks like opting out and City Technology Colleges. The Tory education agenda has clearly failed. The choice is now between a Labour Government committed to modernising our schools or the drift into privatisation of education under the Conservatives."

Note to Editors

Labour has developed practical policies to improve the standard and quality of Britain's education service. Labour will:

Modernising Britain's Schools

• End the scandal of oversized classes. Within a year of taking office the next Labour Government will outlaw classes of over 40 children. We shall then establish maximum limits on class size, which will be progressively reduced until no primary school child is taught in a class of more than 30.

• earmark funds for class and library books.

• Begin a programme to repair our crumbling schools. As a start, we will make sure that no child has to use an outside toilet.

• Create a Reading Standards Programme to make sure that by seven children are reading - with a national reading recovery programme for those in difficulty.

• Introduce a Nursery Programme to provide a nursery place for every three and four year old whose parent wishes it.

• Reform A levels

• Set targets top raise the proportion of youngsters staying on after 16.

• Make teachers valued professionals and promote a new partnership between parents and schools.

ends

23/92

For Immediate Release: 19 February 1992

17,000 PENDLE PENSIONERS IN LINE FOR EXTRA PAYMENTS (23/92)

Almost 17,000 pensioners in Pendle can look forward to an immediate increase in their pensions when Labour forms the next Government according to Westminster hopeful, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice also claimed one third of households with children would get immediate increases in Child Benefit. “These increases are not conditional in any way. They merely start to redress the balance again in favour of pensioners and families with children who have been at the back of the queue throughout the Tory years.”

“Our taxation and benefits policies will emphasise “fairness”. This word is unknown in the Conservative lexicon. We are not out to sting people but we are determined to unpick the unfairnesses that were stitched into the tax system by the Tories. I don’t apologise for one moment for wanting greater fairness in taxes. “

Note to editors

1. The Conservatives abolished the link between pensions and earnings. As a result a single retirement pension has been cut by £12.80 per week and the married pension by £20.50 per week.

2. Even after the rise in October 1991, child benefit will be 30p a week less than its 1987 value for the first child and £2.05p a week less for all other children. In the first year of a Labour Government we will restore the cut in the real value of child benefit since 1987. Thereafter we will progressively increase the value of child benefit so that it more closely matches the true costs of raising a child.

3. The 1981 census revealed that of Pendle's 32,753 households - one third (10,396) were households with children. 40.5% had one child. 41% two children. 12.6% three and 5.7% four or more children. The latest census figures are not yet available.

22/92

For Immediate Release: 19 February 1992

3,000 JOBLESS IN PENDLE "A TRAGEDY" says Prentice

News that unemployment in Pendle has breached the 3,000 barrier should send a shudder down the spine of the area's Tory MP, says Labour's Gordon Prentice. "It is a personal tragedy for every one of those 3,000 people."

Prentice said: "For months now all we have heard from the Tories is the monotonous incantation that recovery is just around the corner. Then - at the time of the latest Smith and Nephew redundancies - we were told to be thankful because elsewhere it was even worse. The latest ploy is to accuse me of "talking Pendle down" for drawing attention to the appalling consequences of Tory policies."

"If our Tory MP imagines for one moment that I am going to bite my tongue to save him from embarrassment, he'll have to think again. He will be asking me next not to draw attention to the latest 35p increase in prescription charges on the grounds that this would undermine confidence in the health service."

ends

24/92

For Immediate Release: 25 February 1992

SICK AS A PARROT (24/92)

The latest increase in prescription charges is enough to make anyone feel as sick as a parrot. That's the diagnosis of Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

The 35p increase due on 1 April this year is the fourteenth since the Tories came to power in 1979. And this one, like all the others, is way above inflation says Prentice.

Prentice said: “Every week I meet people who find it a real struggle to pay their prescription charges. The cost of illness in Pendle has never been higher.”

Note to Editors.

1. Prescription Charges: increases in pence and percentage terms June 19769 - April 1992

Date of increase	Increase in pence	per cent
16 July 1979	25	125.00
1 April 1980	25	55.55
1 December 1980	30	42.85
1 April 1982	30	30.00
1 April 1983	10	7.69
1 April 1984	20	14.28
1 April 1985	40	25.00
1 April 1986	20	10.00
1 April 1987	20	9.09
1 April 1988	20	8.33
1 April 1989	20	7.69
1 April 1990	25	8.92
1 April 1991	35	11.47
1 April 1992	35	10.29

21/92

For Immediate Release 19 February 1992

PRENTICE PLEDGES NURSERY BOOST FOR PENDLE

Labour’s Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle has put figures to Labour’s pledge to provide a nursery place for every 3 and 4 year old whose parents want it.

Under Labour’s formula, Pendle would get an extra 522 nursery places which, says Prentice, would ease a tremendous pent up demand. “I know from speaking to countless parents that this is a top priority for many of them.”

Prentice continued: “In 1972 Margaret Thatcher promised exactly this - but failed to deliver. We are now way behind other European countries in the level of nursery provision. In fact, the Tory record for the under fives is quite lamentable. We are determined to give our three and four year olds the best start in life and part of that means making as many nursery places available as are needed.”

Note to Editors

1. Labour’s pledge is to make available within eight years (by the year 2,000) a nursery place for all three and four year olds whose parents want it.

2. A Note on Methodology. In 1991 there were 18,531 nursery places in Lancashire (Department of Education and Science figures). If 70% of all three

and four year olds take up a nursery place, 27,024 places would be required by the year 2,000. (The 70% estimate is accepted by educationalists and informed commentators as accurate of likely demand. It is estimated that 90% of four year olds and 50% of three year olds would take a place.) This leaves a shortfall of 8,493 places in Lancashire.

3. The extra 8,493 places which will be created by Labour have been apportioned to all 14 Lancashire districts by the % of each District's population to the Lancashire whole. The total for the table does not exactly match 8,493 due to rounding.

4. The District figures. Lancashire population 1,390,800.

DISTRICT	POPULATION.% of Lancashire whole	EXTRA NURSERY PLACES
Blackburn	9.7%	828
Blackpool	10.2%	870
Burnley	6.5%	556
Chorley	6.9%	590
Fylde	5.2%	446
Hyndburn	5.6%	480
Lancaster	9.4%	802
Pendle	6.1%	522
Preston	9.2%	785
Ribble Valley	3.7%	318
Rossendale	4.7%	403
South Ribble	7.3%	624
West Lancs	7.5%	641
Wyre	7.4%	632

16/92

For Immediate Release: 12 February 1992

NELSON MAN STAYS BEHIND BARS

The bid by Roy Hattersley MP and Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, to persuade the Home Secretary to free a Nelson man jailed over twenty years ago has failed.

The case of Antony Alexandrowicz who was jailed in 1971 for a crime he says he never committed has been the subject of extensive Press comment as well as a Granada TV documentary.

Hattersley wrote to Tory Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, on 6 June last year following an approach to him by Gordon Prentice.

Prentice said: "Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in jail for far too long. There is no sense of urgency about this case - eight months for the Home Office to reply to a letter is simply not good enough. Alex absconded from open prison to draw attention to his desperate plight. After a short period outside - during which he was interviewed by Granada Television - he gave himself up to the authorities. Now Kenneth Baker tells us his case will be referred to a local review committee "as the initial stage of a further review by the Parole Board".

Inevitably, this could take many more months. The response from the Home Secretary has been terribly disappointing" said Prentice

ends

Note to Editors

Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in prison for twenty years for a crime which, he maintains, he did not commit. Alexandrowicz was born in Nelson in Lancashire. He had a difficult home life and he was taken into care at the age of 12 because of violence in the family. After he left Approved School he became a small time burglar. When he was 17, he allegedly broke into a house in Preston and stabbed the woman living there in the breast and stomach. Apparently, she left the hospital the same day as she was admitted.

At the police station he made a confession - which he now says was made under duress. To this day, he maintains he is innocent. At the time, the psychiatric reports labelled him as someone prone to depression. However, he was not sent to a place where his condition could be treated but to an ordinary prison. He was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for wounding and aggravated burglary. He ended up in Parkhurst as a Category A prisoner. The experience brutalised him and he had a number of run ins with the prison authorities.

In 1988, three prison governors and two psychiatrists recommended to the Parole Board that he should be released. The Parole Board agreed and, in turn, reported to the Home Secretary who turned down the recommendation. The medical evidence confirmed that he was no danger to society.

The Granada TV programme advances one - very far fetched - theory in an attempt to explain the Home Office decision. Alexandrowicz is of Russian extraction. Although he knew his father had served with the Red Army he (Alexandrowicz) knew nothing of his grandparents. When Alexandrowicz was 16 he went to the Soviet Embassy to ask if they could help trace his long lost grandparents. When he was 21, Alexandrowicz applied for Soviet citizenship. The TV programme suggests that this found its way into Home Office files and prejudiced his chance of release from prison.

With all hope gone, he decided to escape from the open prison he was in. He contacted the TV people; gave them his story and then turned himself in. He is now back in prison with no date set for his possible release.

25/92

For Immediate Release: 25 February 1992

PARTY TIME HAS FEW TAKERS observes Prentice (25/92)

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, has dared Pendle's Tory MP to risk public ridicule and repeat his call for "a public holiday with street parties and celebrations" to mark the end of the Poll Tax. Lee made his call to The Independent in March 1991 as the Government struggled to devise an alternative to the Poll Tax.

Prentice told a meeting of the of the local Labour Party in Nelson last weekend that Lee would be unable to utter the same words a year on without cringing with embarrassment."

Prentice added: "His comments turned the tragedy of Poll Tax into farce. A street party in Pendle would be laughed out of court. I have never heard anything quite so fatuous. The Poll tax is still with us and it is entirely the fault of the Tory Government - not Pendle Council."

Pendle Council is meeting next week to set the Poll tax for the coming year.

Note to Editors

1. The Conservative Government has decided to withdraw £25 a head "Area Protection Grant" from Pendle. This will feed through directly into the coming year's Poll Tax of £262.

2. The 6.8% increase in Lancashire County Council's Standard Spending Assessment is eclipsed by many Conservative counties (the SSA is what the Government thinks a local authority ought to spend).

3. The increase in the Lancashire CC precept - which feeds into the Pendle Poll Tax - is well below Conservative counties. The highest precept increase is Tory Kent (+13.3%), Tory Lincolnshire (+10.7%) and Tory East Sussex (+9.0%). Lancashire's increase is 6.5%.

4. The spending of all councils can now be capped by the Government.

5. Below is an extract from The Times of 19 February.

20/92

For Immediate Release 18 February 1992

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT FALLS ON PENDLE

As the pre election campaign hots up, the media spotlight has focussed on Pendle - one of the nation's bellweather seats where the result will point to the outcome of the General Election.

In last weekend's edition of the Independent on Sunday readers were told that "if Pendle is anything to judge by, the Tories would do well to treat reports of a revival in the marginals with caution."

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This is a pretty accurate assessment on the position here in Pendle. The Tories are constantly talking up their chances but who believes them any more? People judge things from their own experience. If factories are closing down and jobs are being lost - we are not, as the Tories would have us believe, pulling out of recession.

"Our Tory MP told the Independent on Sunday that when he resigned in July 1989 to spend more time on his business interests "the odds of retaining the seat at that stage were almost zero." Since then, the economy has plunged into the worst recession for 60 years. The GDP figures due out this Thursday (20

February) will show the biggest collapse in output since the depression. Manufacturing industry has been crucified. Service industries such as our MP's own Country Holidays are laying people off. The Poll Tax is alive and well. Our local hospitals and clinics are being ripped out of a unified National Health Service. Our schools and colleges are being underfunded and neglected. And over the past year our MP has refused on every occasion to debate these important issues with me."

Prentice concluded: "Earlier this week I received an invitation from the Nelson Churches in Covenant to attend a pre-election meeting with the other candidates. I have accepted. I hope our MP will also do so."

19/92

For Immediate Release: 17 February 1992

PRENTICE BACKS REYNARD THE FOX

Reynard the Fox has a friend for life in Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

Gordon Prentice told the Nelson Leader earlier this week that he was sad and disappointed that Pendle's Tory MP had voted in the House of Commons to oppose the Wild Animals (Protection) Bill which would have outlawed fox and deer hunting with hounds. The Bill fell by only 12 votes.

Prentice said: "I would most certainly have voted against this brutal, organised savagery. The Bill sought to correct an anomaly in the law that permits people wilfully to inflict on a wild mammal an act of cruelty which would be criminal if it were inflicted on a domestic animal."

Prentice continued: "Pendle's Tory MP is out of tune with public opinion. If he had been around in 1835 no doubt he would have voted to continue bear baiting. In 1849 he'd have found a reason to support cock fighting. And in 1911 he'd have voted against the Protection of Animals Act which outlawed dog fighting. He would have been on the wrong side of the argument then - as he is now."

"If these "sports" were banned because of their unbearable cruelty there is no sensible or logical reason why fox, hare and deer hunting with hounds should not now be banned also."

Note to Editor

1. Bear baiting was made illegal in 1835, cock-fighting in 1849 and dog fighting in 1911.

2. No Labour MP voted against the Wild Animals (Protection) Bill. A number of Tory MPs voted for the Bill. One, Teddy Taylor, said: "There is no point in denying that fox hunting is a deliberately cruel sport. It is designed to involve great cruelty by extending the long period of a hunt. There is no point in trying to argue that there is a social purpose in fox hunting. The contribution

made by fox hunters to the control of the fox population is so insignificant that it does not really matter at all."

4. The Bill would specifically not outlaw shooting or angling. Besides fox hunting, it would have outlawed hare coursing and the hunting of deer with dogs (already unlawful in Scotland).

27/92

For Immediate Release: 26 February 1992

COUNCIL TAX HITS SNAGS says Prentice (27/92)

The Government's controversial replacement to the Poll Tax - the Council Tax - has run into difficulties a year before its planned introduction claims Labour's Gordon Prentice.

A leaked report from the Inland Revenue Valuation Office which is supervising house valuations across the country shows that as many as two out of three homes in some areas have been wrongly valued.

Under the Tory proposals, houses in Pendle will be divided into eight bands with the tax calculated in such a way as to ensure that those living in the most expensive properties never pay more than three times the tax due on the cheapest and most modest terraced accommodation.

The valuation in Pendle is being carried out in three "parcels" with the local valuation office carrying out one and a private estate agent the remaining two.

The leaked report which was obtained by Labour MP David Blunkett showed that across the country one in 10 valuations carried out by estate agents was incorrect. In some areas, things were worse. In Preston, 26 batches were checked and 8 failed giving a failure rate of 31%. In Burnley, 40 batches were checked and a quarter failed.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Eternal vigilance is required whenever the Tories touch the subject of local government finance. As the Poll Tax shows they have an infinite capacity to screw things up. The number of faulty valuations is horrifying. I predict an avalanche of appeals."

Note to Editors

1. The valuations in Pendle started in January 92 and will be completed by the end of May.

2. Estate agents are paid anything from 20p to £10.95 to value each property.

3. Labour will scrap the Council Tax and introduce Fair Rates as from April 93

4. In Pendle 50% of all properties as assumed by the Government to lie in band A - the lowest band. Half the households in the constituency will be paying exactly the same.

Band A Band B Band C Band D Band E Band F Band G Band H

Under	£40K	-	£52	-	£68K	-	£88K	-	£120K	-	£160K	-	over
£40,000	£52K		£68		£88K		£120K		£160		£320K		£320K
50%	18%		17%		11%		2%		1%		1%		neg

26/92
For Immediate Release:25 February 1992

PENDLE PAYS £884,331 MORE FOR ELECTRICITY THIS YEAR says Prentice (26/92)

The last round of price increases have cost the people of Pendle £884,331 according to a new analysis by the Labour Party. This reveals that Norweb customers will each have paid out an extra £27 because of the price increases pushed through in April 1991. Altogether this means families in Pendle are being forced to hand over close to a million pounds with nothing to show for it.

In April last year, Norweb put up its standing charges by 18 per cent - the highest increase in England. The price for each unit of electricity went up by 9%. This leaves Norweb with a unit price of 7.26p.

Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, said: "These electricity price increases have taken over £800,000 out of the local economy. This has added to the local recession because moist of the dividends are paid out to City institutions, not to local people."

"All these easy pickings for the local electricity monopoly have had to be paid out when most local people and local businesses are finding it hard to make ends meet. Many local families and pensioners can't afford to keep warm in the bitter winter weather."

ends

Note to Editor

1 The last census identified 32,753 households in Pendle. £27 per household gives £884,331.

28/92

For Immediate Release: 26 February 1992

PENDLE'S LONG TERM JOBLESS SOARS (28/92)

Figures from Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Gordon Prentice, show that long term unemployment in Pendle has soared over the past twelve months.

In the year from January 91 - January 92 the number of long term unemployed (ie more than 12 months) increased by 51% - from 375 to 565. Unemployment among the under 25s went up by 45% - from 693 to 1,006. And the number of young people in the "guarantee group" zoomed by 106% - from 148 to 305.

Prentice said: "These figures tell their own story. A whole generation is being touched by the unemployment generated by two Tory recessions in a decade."

Note to Editors

1. The “guarantee group” are those under 25 who have been unemployed for 6 months or more who are “guaranteed” a training place.

2. Figures from the independent Unemployment Unit.

15/92 for immediate release 16 June 1992

HONOURS LIST SHOULD GO says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing an Early day Motion in Parliament urging the prime Minister to abolish the Honours system as a "cautious step towards a classless society".

Prentice said: "The contribution that people make to their local communities and to the nation at large should be recognised in some way but the present system is totally indefensible and should be swept away. We need to start with a clean slate.

Prentice asked: "Why should awards to military personnel be determined by their rank? Why should gongs automatically go to senior civil servants? Why should the Tory benches in Parliament be stuffed full of knights and dames - honours given for "political service"? And, most bizarre of all, why do we tolerate the House of Lords which has no parallel anywhere in the world save, perhaps, one or two remote pacific islands where the hereditary principle lives on?

"The Prime Minister has promised a review of the honours system. I don't want to see any feeble tinkering but a root and branch reform."

16/92. For immediate release 16 June 1992

NORWEB PROFITS "A DISGRACE" says Prentice

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has condemned Norweb's full year profits as "a disgrace". Prentice told the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, that "the Norweb monopoly has been milking Pendle and the rest of the North west ever since privatisation".

Prentice also slammed the high salaries paid to Norweb board members and the share option scheme which allows directors to make hundreds of thousands of pounds out of long term increases in Norweb's share values.

Prentice commented: "Norweb is coining it at the expense of my constituents. It's not on."

ends

enclosed letter to Michael Heseltine.

C17/92 for immediate release 16 June 1992

GOVERNMENT HAS NO PLANS TO EXTEND M65 says Prentice

The M65 has been dubbed "the road to no-where" by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, following a Government announcement that it had no plans to extend the motorway eastwards.

Prentice tabled a Parliamentary Question to the Minister of Transport, Kenneth Carlisle MP, following continuing speculation about the future of the motorway.

Prentice commented: "My own view is that a motorway link to the east would, in the longer term, attract investment and strengthen the local economy. It would also ease congestion on local roads. But the plain fact is that it is not in the Government's roads programme. The announcement will probably cool the fevered debate that erupts from time to time about the routeing of the motorway."

18/92 for immediate release 16 June 1992

LANCASHIRE'S UNWILLING DONORS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has stepped into the controversy over who funds the Queen's private wealth. "It turns out that over the years, millions of pounds have gone into the monarch's private bank accounts from Lancashire people who died without making a will" says Prentice.

"The Duchy of Lancaster has been in existence since 1265 and has been providing revenues to the monarch since then. Until relatively recently fines levied in local magistrates courts went into the royal purse. Even today, land sold by the Duchy does not attract capital gains tax. But the most quirky hangover from the past must be the rule that the estate of those who die without making a will goes into the royal bank account.

"We are not talking about one or two cases a year but around four hundred. Over the past decade over £7.5m has disappeared into the royal vaults. The case that the sovereign should pay tax is absolutely overwhelming" said Prentice.

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
President of the Board of Trade
Department of Trade and Industry
Ashdown House
123 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

16 June 1992

Dear Michael

Following the news today that Norweb's full year profits have soared to £138m I am writing to urge you to take immediate steps to control the runaway profits of this monopoly which has been milking my constituency and the rest of the North West ever since privatisation.

This company has an extortionate record in extracting cash from its customers. In April last year, Norweb put up its standing charges by 18 per cent to £20.88p - the highest increase in England. The price for each unit of

electricity went up by 9%. At the time this cost my constituents £884,331 - or £27 for each household in Pendle.

Norweb's half year profits last September stood at £33.4m - that is equal to £17.66 profit per domestic customer in just six months.
The full year profits, reported today, come in at a monumental £138m, up 96% on the £70m full year profits for last year.

Do you not agree with me that these figures are scandalous. And to add insult to injury, my constituents are bankrolling a luxurious lifestyle for Norweb's directors. In August of last year, the Chairman of NORWEB, Kenneth Harvey, was awarded an increase of 165% - taking his salary from £62,270 to a stratospheric £165,000 a year. This works out at an increase of £3,173 per week.

This salary should be seen alongside the generous share options the Norweb Directors have awarded themselves. Kenneth Harvey
has 108,080 share options and his fellow directors have half as much each. As you know, they can exercise their right to buy shares under the Executive Share Option Scheme for £3.11 between February 1994 and February 2001. Last July, *The Mail on Sunday* estimated that this represented a profit to date of £51,198 for Kenneth Harvey. Their estimate of the long term value of his share options is £333,448. Do you think it appropriate for the people who are running one of our major monopoly industries to cream off enormous salaries and then top them off with extravagant share options?

I am copying this letter to the press.

Yours
Gordon Prentice MP

For Immediate Release: 20 July 1992
NS20/92

NURSERY EDUCATION FUNDING "INDEFENSIBLE" says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted the Government for fiddling the way in which cash is earmarked for the under fives. Prentice says that money is going to local authorities which don't spend it on the youngsters.

Prentice was commenting on a survey last week released by Shadow Education spokesperson, Jack Straw, which showed that six Conservative county councils received £43m in Government grants for 30,000 non existent nursery places.

Prentice said: "This fiddling and diddling really makes my blood boil. In contrast, there are six Labour controlled county councils which provide 27,000 more nursery places at a cost of £39.3m for which they receive no Government grant whatsoever."

"Here in Lancashire where there is still tremendous unmet demand for nursery places, the county council is providing 1,908 **more** nursery places than the Government believes it should. This costs £2.8m and the Government doesn't pay a penny towards this. Next door in North Yorkshire, the county council provides 1,402 **fewer** places than they should."

Prentice concluded: "The whole grant system is rigged to favour local authorities for whom the under fives are an afterthought. County councils such as Lancashire that are trying to do their bit are unfairly penalised. I shall be pressing the Government to change this absurd, topsy-turvy system" said Prentice.

Note to Editors

Local authorities receive grants from central government to provide a level of services which the Government considers right for the area. The objective is to equalise the standard of provision across the country taking into account the resources available to local authorities. These "standard spending assessments" (SSA) have been criticised for being deeply flawed.

Of all the shire county councils, the six worst offenders when it comes to providing for the under fives are all Conservative controlled county councils. The figures show that, based upon the current level of SSA funding, Hampshire under provides by 8,882 nursery places; Essex by 7,861 places; Kent by 4,025 places; Surrey by 3,956 places; West Sussex by 3,821 places and Norfolk by 1,209 places. By contrast, Labour controlled counties are amongst the best providers. Cleveland, for example, provides nursery places for 6,203 more children than it gets grant for; Northumberland 5,201 and Durham 4,131.

Provision of Nursery Education places in Shire Counties

Council	£m SSA	Under 5 pop	Under 5 funding	Provision
Avon	14.592	11721	10018	+1703
Bedfordshire	10.668	6842	7325	-483
Berkshire	13.651	6002	9373	-3371
Bucks	10.635	5065	7302	-2237
Cambs	10.328	7465	7091	+374
Cheshire	14.343	13537	9848	+3689
Cleveland	11.943	14403	8200	+6203
Cornwall	6.498	4817	4461	+356
Cumbria	6.543	6643	4492	+2151
Derbyshire	13.549	13947	9302	+4645
Devon	14.250	6490	9784	-3294
Dorset	8.251	5252	5665	-413
Durham,	9.405	10588	6457	+4131
East Sussex	10.206	5831	7007	-1176
Essex	23.912	8557	16418	-7861
Gloucester're	7.575	4097	5201	-1104
Hampshire	24.830	8166	17048	-8882
Hereford & Worcester	9.316	3499	6396	-2897
Hertfordsh're	15.801	12525	10848	+1677
HUmberside	15.198	13230	10434	+2796
Isle of Wight	1.764	1093	1211	-118
Kent	24.136	12546	16571	-4025
Lancashire	**24.919**	**19017**	**17109**	**+1908**
Leics	15.858	9356	10888	-1532
Lincs	8.051	5320	5528	-208
Norfolk	10.042	5686	6895	-1209

Northants	9.552	7855	6558	+1297
Northumb'ld	3.986	7938	2737	+5201
North Yorkshire	**9.023**	**4793**	**6195**	**-1402**
Notts	17.962	15160	12332	+2828
Oxfordshire	8.832	3218	6064	-2846
Shropshire	5.885	3565	4041	-476
Somerset	6.168	3770	4235	-465
Staffs	15.613	14159	10719	+3440
Suffolk	9.420	5233	6467	-1234
Surrey	14.610	6075	10031	-3956
Warwicks	6.716	5928	4611	+1317
West Sussex	9.361	2606	6427	-3821
Wiltshire	8.571	2735	5885	-3125

1. Nursery element of Standard Spending Assessment: 1992/93 settlement, £ million (Department of the Environment Rate Support Grant Settlement 1992/3)

2. Under five population - actual number of pupils under five in nursery and primary schools at January 1991 (DES Statistical Bulletin 5/92)

3. Under five funding places that could be bought with the national average SSA per child in under five education : £1,456.499 divided into the authority's SSA (column 1)

4. Under five provision - a measure of mean or generous provision - column 2 minus column 3.

For Immediate Release: 20 July 1992
NS21/92

PENDLE JOBLESS SOARS UNDER MAJOR says PRENTICE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has launched a blistering attack on Prime Minister John Major in the wake of the latest unemployment figures which show Pendle's jobless totals stuck above 3,000.

Prentice told a meeting of unemployed youngsters in Nelson this week that the Prime Minister had deliberately allowed unemployment to rise as a way of controlling the level of demand in the economy and, therefore, the rate of inflation. "There is no inflation in a cemetery because no-one is doing anything. A bit like Britain under the Tories."

Prentice said: "Since the Tories got rid of Margaret Thatcher in November 1990 and John Major became Prime Minister things have gone from bad to worse for Pendle's jobless. When Major took over, unemployment in Pendle stood at 1,708. The latest figure is 3,015 - or 7.8% of the workforce. Up by a staggering 1,307.

Prentice continued: "The British economy has been in deep recession for two years and it is places like Pendle - not John Major's Huntingdon - that are paying the price. We now have the highest real interest rates since 1931 and the complacency of the Government is truly staggering."
For Immediate Release: 22 July 1992

NS22/92

PRENTICE DEFENDS NHS DENTISTRY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing dentists' claims that the Government is to blame for the crisis in NHS dentistry.

According to Prentice the threat of a breakdown in NHS dentistry looms large in Pendle following Monday's vote by Lancashire dentists to stop treating new NHS patients.

The confrontation reached boiling point with the Government's decision to cut dentists' fees by 7% - despite a big increase in the number of patients being treated.

Prentice said: "I know from speaking to many local dentists - who are committed to working within the NHS - that the Government's actions have strained their loyalty to breaking point. Nationally, in 1991/2 dentists registered some 21.6 million patients against a forecast of 17.7 million. And here in Pendle I know for a fact that our dentists are shouldering an increased workload, longer hours and higher practice costs and are having to accept a cut in income."

"All the talk about the NHS being safe in Tory hands amounts to the biggest confidence trick in modern British political history. We are witnessing before our very eyes the erosion of NHS dentistry. By increasing charges to patients while cutting income to dentists, the Government is on course to creating a privatised service where those who can afford to pay get gold plated treatment and those who can't pay get a kick in the teeth."

Prentice is also calling for the re-introduction of free dental check ups as part of a plan to improve the nation's health.

For Immediate Release: 29 July 1992
NS24/92

NORWEB PULLS THE PLUG ON LOCAL FIRMS says PRENTICE

The regional electricity monopoly, Norweb, is demanding huge advance payments from struggling local firms - for electricity they haven't yet used, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice says cash is being extorted from ailing firms who claim the inflated bills could make the difference between surviving and going under in the current recession.

"I have spoken to a number of local business people about the effect that Norweb's policy has on their firms. It does make a difference to the bottom line when thousands of pounds have to be handed over to Norweb before a plug ever reaches a socket. I am told the policy is necessary because the recession has pitched so many firms out of business Norweb was concerned about companies going under with electricity bills going unpaid. But by this very action they are making life so much more difficult for their industrial customers."

Norweb runs credit checks on industrial customers and if it gives a thumbs down then a deposit is demanded - even if all previous electricity bills have been paid in full.

Prentice continued: "I am taking the matter up with Norweb and with OFFER - the electricity watchdog that, so far, hasn't barked. The whole thing leaves a very nasty taste in the mouth given that Norweb's excess profits last year were equal to £58 for each Norweb customer.

"Over the last four years electricity profits have shot up by 150% while inflation has gone up 31%. That is equal to £58 excess profits for every Norweb customer. No monopoly supplier of an essential service should be able to raise its profits like this during a recession, especially when their costs are falling.

"Norweb's profit increase last year was the highest in England. their profit increase over the last four years was the third highest in England. Over the period since electricity privatisation was announced in 1986, Norweb's standing charges have gone up by 64% - the biggest increase in the whole country."

For Immediate Release: 29 July 1992
NS25/92

MP SLATES NEW EDUCATION PLANS

The Government's Education White Paper ***"Choice and Diversity"*** has been lambasted by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says it provides no coherent strategy for raising standards in our schools. And its promise of greater choice for parents is dismissed as "meaningless rhetoric".

The White Paper - which foreshadows legislation in the coming Parliamentary session - envisages a drastic change in the role of local education authorities. Although they will survive in a very reduced form, a parallel bureaucracy will be set up to service the grant maintained sector. The proposals will lead to increased centralisation and control from Whitehall with less accountability.

Prentice continued: "All this talk about the ***Parents' Charter*** isn't worth the paper its written on. The Conservatives have been in power for thirteen years and an entire generation of schoolchildren has gone through the system. If it is not working then it is the Government's fault - no-one elses. The White Paper does not address the concerns of parents for higher standards with more books and some stability. There are no new resources for our children's education. All we get from this Government is constant upheaval and change which - at the end of the day - doesn't deliver the goods.

Prentice concluded: "Over recent weeks I have had a stream of parents come to see me having tried and failed to exercise their "right to choose" under the ***Parents' Charter***. For my constituents this amounts to no more than the right to say which school they prefer. I have challenged the Secretary of State for Education to tell me what advice I should offer my constituents who want to exercise the much vaunted right to choose - but cannot. There was some coughing and shuffling of feet but nothing else.

For Immediate Release: 4 August 1992
NS26/92

PRENTICE FIGHTS FOR TRAVEL CASH

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is battling to win back cash lost by Pendle people after the collapse of Land Travel. The company went bust and left thousands of holiday makers stranded on the continent.

Prentice said: "I know of a handful of constituents who lost money but there could be many more. Up to 80,000 people nationwide may have been victims of this collapse."

Prentice is joining a deputation of MPs to see Consumer Affairs Minister, Baroness Denton to see what help may be made available to people who lost money.

Prentice said: "I want to know if the Department of Trade and Industry was negligent in failing to monitor the activities of this company and warn the public. If any negligence on the part of the DTI is established then I will be calling for compensation to be paid.

"The key allegations already reported in the press are that one of the principals of Land Travel had already run a travel company which went bankrupt. Last year Land Travel's auditors Price Waterhouse refused to approve the accounts. And for the last eight weeks it has been open knowledge in the travel industry that this company was in deep trouble."

"Neither this bust company nor the Government are going to be allowed to wash their hands of this affair. My constituents are not going to be left high and dry."

For Immediate Release: 12 August 1992
NS27/92

PRENTICE CALLS FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY ON RUBBISH TIP PROPOSAL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has urged Environment Secretary, Michael Howard, to decide on the controversial planning application to turn Moor Isles farm into a rubbish tip.

Under the planning laws, Lancashire County Council is authorised to decide on major planning applications but there are provisions for central government to "call in" proposals which are of major significance.

Prentice said: "This planning application by UK Waste Management will turn a beautiful corner of Pendle into a terrible blot on the landscape. And if it is approved it will drive a coach and horses through the planning system which is supposed to protect people and places from rapacious developers."

Prentice continued: "The application has generated a tremendous amount of local opposition. The proposed site for the rubbish tip is in the Green Belt and the ground is unstable. I have seen evidence of old mine workings and I

shudder to think what would happen if any nasty toxic materials seeped from the tip into the water table."

"What is needed is a full scale public inquiry where the proposal can be subjected to rigorous scrutiny. That is why I am calling on the Minister to intervene."

For Immediate Release: 12 August 1992
NS28/92

IT'S WATER TORTURE SAYS PRENTICE

Water meters coupled with exhorbitant standing charges are creating a two tier system with sky high bills for some and lower charges for others according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice claims that metering is being targetted on new developments - often housing association properties where pensioners and others on low and modest incomes live.

"In one development in Colne where many pensioners live, there is a standing charge of £103 which must be paid before a drop of water is used. It's nothing less than water torture for many of our elderly people" says Prentice. "They are then expected to pay through the nose for their water while others get by with lower bills.

"I shall be drawing this to the attention of the Director General of Water Services, Ian Byatt, who is supposed to protect the interests of the consumer. The water watchdog OFWAT has looked at different ways of charging for water - from licensing, to property banding and water metering. No system is perfect. They all have their drawbacks but it cannot be right for those on metered water to be soaked when compared to others."

ends

The average household bill for unmeasured water in the North West was £156 in April 1992. This was made up of a water element (£73) and sewerage (£83). The average measured standing charge in the North West was £99 (£43 water and £56 sewerage). The cost of the water used is, of course, extra. Source OFWAT.

Since privatisation the average water bill has increased by 47.1%. Water charges have risen by almost three times the rate of inflation. In January 1989 the present Environment Secretary, Michael Howard, said "any price increase will be modest". In the North West, water charges have skyrocketted by 41% since 1989.

Last year, 900,000 court summonses were instigated by water companies against households with water debts. There has been a massive increase in the number of families who have had their water supply turned off. OFWAT reported that 21,000 households have had their water supplies disconnected during 1991/2. That figure represents a staggering 177% increase in the number of disconnections in just one year.

For Immediate Release: 17 August 1992

NS29/92

PRENTICE BACKS *ARTHRITIS CARE*

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be speaking out on behalf of the thousands of people in the area who suffer from arthritis. At its inaugural meeting last week, the new Pendle Branch of ***Arthritis Care***, appointed the local MP as its first President.

Prentice told the meeting at Colne that although he was not an arthritis sufferer himself he knew plenty of people who were. "Arthritis is an extremely common disease, affecting about one in six people in its mildest form. It is not prevalent in any particular area but is spread across the country. And while we still don't know what causes it, we are acutely aware of the misery it produces."

Prentice said afterwards: "I am delighted to be associated with ***Arthritis Care*** and I shall be doing everything I can to help the new organisation."

"We need to encourage research into a cure and we need to ensure that the NHS and all the statutory agencies are providing the back up to support arthritis sufferers."

Note to editors

There are over 200 rheumatic diseases. In any one year, up to 20 million people are likely to be suffering from some form of one of these diseases. Each year, 8 million people consult their doctor about arthritis or rheumatism. Arthritis affects the joints of the body. It can cause stiffness, swelling and severe pain. It can make even simple daily tasks difficult. Rheumatism is a more general term an d covers any sort of pain in the bones, muscles or joints. Many people believe arthritis and rheumatism are diseases of old age. In fact they affect: 15,000 children; 1 in every twenty people aged 16 - 44; 4 in every twenty people aged 45 - 64; 8 in every twenty people aged over 65. Arthritis is the most common cause of physical disability in the UK.

For Immediate Release: 17 August 1992
NS30/92

PENDLE JOBLESS HITS NEW HIGH

Pendle's jobless total last month hit a new high according to MP, Gordon Prentice. The July figure is 3,274 people out of work and claiming benefit - up from 3,015 the month before.

"The Tory Government is on permanent holiday as far as the unemployed are concerned. The relentless rise in the jobless totals has absolutely no impact on Government policy. We now have 8.5% of local people on the dole and the Government is twiddling its thumbs."

"We need immediate action to lower interest rates, boost construction and get the economy moving again. And we need a new positive commitment to encourage and support our manufacturing industries" said Prentice. "The unemployment statistics are there for all to see. The facts about business

collapses and cut backs are available to anyone who is prepared to look. And yet the Government seems congenitally incapable of responding. The only thing they're good at is whistling in the dark and hoping something will turn up."

ends

Note to editors

The Table overleaf shows the rise in Pendle's jobless totals since January 1990. John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990.

For Immediate Release: 17 August 1992
NS31/92

PRENTICE BACKS CALL FOR ASSISTED AREA STATUS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is pushing for Pendle's inclusion in the new map of "assisted areas" which the Government plans to implement next year.

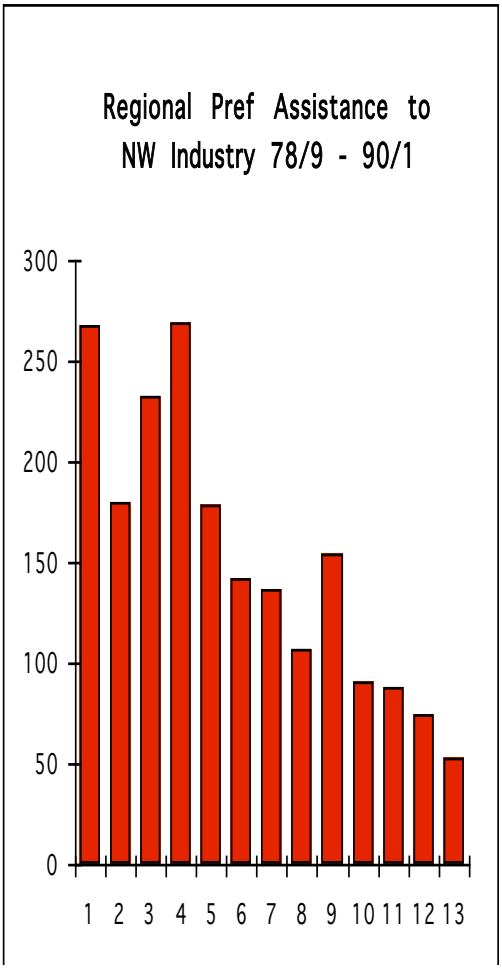
Assisted areas qualify for special help through Regional Selective Assistance Grants and Regional Enterprise Grants - designed to help firms create or safeguard existing jobs and invest in new products.

Prentice said: "The North West has been hammered for more than a decade. Since 1978/9 Government spending in the North West on regional preferential assistance to industry has been cut by 80% - the biggest percentage reduction of any region in Britain. In 78/9 the government was spending £267m on North West industry. Last year, this figure had collapsed to £53m."

"Pendle has every right to be included in the new Assisted Areas map. Our unemployment is moving upwards relentlessly and our industries have had to take the worst of the Tory recession. We must do everything we can to reverse the process of de-industrialisation."

Note to Editors

The Government's consultation period on the shape of the new assisted areas map runs until 30 September 1992. It was last reviewed in 1984. The criteria to be used in the current review include unemployment levels; future demand for jobs in an area and the growth/decline in local industries; demographic changes; urban problems; distance from markets etc. Getting on the Assisted Areas map makes it more likely that an area will benefit from EC Regional Policy. Pendle Borough Council is also pressing for the area's inclusion.



For Immediate Release: 16 September 1992
NS32/92

MP CALLS FOR REVIEW OF CIVIL LIST

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for deep cuts in the Civil List. The Queen and other members of the Royal Family receive £7.9m a year - automatically uprated each year by 7.5%, the assumed inflation rate.

Prentice told a meeting of constituency party members earlier this week that the present set up was indefensible. "We have many more people on our Civil List than any of the other constitutional monarchies in Europe. And they get paid a lot more too. Do we really need to pay £249,000 a year to the Duke of York - or £219,000 a year to Princess Margaret or £228,000 to the Princess Royal?

"Unfortunately, it doesn't stop there. The Civil List extends to the further reaches of the Royal Family annually depositing vast sums of money on individuals who should be out in the world earning a living."

Prentice continued: "What is truly grotesque is that MPs are unable to debate these issues in Parliament. In a deal agreed by the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and John Major the Civil List cannot be reviewed by Parliament for the next ten years. "Something has got to give" says Prentice. "It is simply unacceptable for the State to bankroll luxurious lifestyles of

people who have no constitutional function and contribute very little. The Queen could set an example by volunteering to pay tax on her colossal personal fortune."

For Immediate Release: 16 September 1992
NS33/92

BANKRUPT TRAVEL FIRM RE-EMERGES UNDER DIFFERENT NAME

Land Travel, the holiday firm that went broke in July, ruining the holidays of thousands of people nationwide including some in Pendle, is set to re-emerge under a different name.

The news brought a angry reaction from local MP Gordon Prentice who has been battling to get full refunds for Pendle people who lost money. "It beggars belief that a new travel company, ***Tours Direct***, can emerge phoenix-like from the ashes of the old. I am told that the new company will be selling coach trips on the continent - just like Land Travel.

Prentice has renewed his demand for the Government to compensate the victims of the ***Land Travel*** collapse. "This latest episode adds insult to injury. If the collapsed ***Land Travel*** can walk away from its responsibilities and twelve of its former managers set up shop under a different name, there needs to be the closest possible scrutiny of the new company, its financial resources and assets, the competence of its directors and senior managers and its overall fitness to sell holidays to the public. Tighter regulation is clearly essential."

ends

Note to Editors

At the time of Land Travel's collapse in July, Prentice pressed the Consumer Affairs Minister Baroness Denton for details of the Government's role in the affair. He claimed the Department of Trade and Industry was negligent in failing to monitor the activities of the company and warn the public. The key allegations were that one of the principals of Land Travel had already run a travel company which went bankrupt. And last year Land Travel's auditors Price Waterhouse refused to approve the accounts.

For Immediate Release: 16 September 1992
NS34/92

PRENTICE SLAMS INTEREST RATE HIKE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has condemned today's (Wednesday) 2% hike in interest rates saying the decision will plunge Britain from depression into slump.

Prentice said: "We are back up to a base rate of 12% and millions of people will be paying 15% for their loans. We have the highest real interest rates since the thirties depression and the policy is squeezing the life blood from our ailing economy.

"The Tory Government has utterly neglected policies which would have re-build, re-equipped and re-tooled our industries and they have presided over an accelerating erosion of our skills base. We are pulling out of whole areas of manufacturing industry and ceding the ground to our competitors. Our currency is weak because our economy is weak. I am fed up listening to the Prime Minister going on about making sterling Europe's strongest currency. That is a totally unobtainable objective so long as the real economy - the firms, the factories and the products they make - is allowed to wither away. The decision to hike interest rates so soon after the General Election - when we were all assured the green shoots of recovery were about to sprout - is a massive betrayal of the British people."

"The Bank of England official briefings on the state of the economy are worse than useless. People would be better off consulting Tarot Cards. Last month, the Bank said that while the economic outlook remained uncertain *slow growth in the economy should be evident during the remainder of the year.* This is wishful thinking. The increase in interest rates will kill off any prospect of an increase in consumer spending - which was already depressed as people struggled to pay off the colossal debts accumulated in the late eighties' Lawson boom."

For Immediate Release: 16 September 1992
NS35/92

PRENTICE URGES AID FOR PAKISTAN

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging the Government to respond positively to appeals for aid from flood stricken Pakistan. Prentice has written to Overseas Aid Minister, Baroness Chalker, to press the case for helping Pakistan cope with the disaster.

Prentice told Baroness Chalker that the scenes of devastation and misery broadcast on television underlined the scale of the catastrophe. "Thousands of people have perished, crops have been lost, bridges have been swept away, the country is pitched into chaos. We in Britain need to do all in our power to help the country to recover and the people rebuild their lives."

Prentice has also been in touch with the High Commissioner for Pakistan about the relief effort.

For Immediate Release: 17 September 1992
NS36/92

JOBLESS TOTALS UP AGAIN

Pendle's jobless total is up yet again - reaching another new high of 3,355 or 8.7%. The latest figures for August, released today, are almost double the figure John Major inherited when he became Prime Minister in November 1990. At that time there were 1708 Pendle people out of work and claiming benefit.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The relentless rise in unemployment in Pendle is a stark testimony to the total failure of Conservative economic

policy. Major has created misery on a spectacular scale by his pig headed attachment to maintaining the £ at DM2.95 and ignoring what was happening in the real economy. It's about time the teflon started to peel off the Prime Minister whose Happy Eater image has previously shielded him from criticism. He has presided over a real devaluation of the £ sterling, something he set his face against."

Prentice added: "When Norman Lamont said that *unemployment was a price well worth paying* he was giving Pendle's jobless a poke in the eye. Now, after the utter shambles of the past 48 hours, the country is back to square one, the Government's central policy in tatters, with an even weaker economy, a soaring deficit, the prospect of deep cuts in public services and manufacturing industry flat on its back. Inflation has come down - but at a terrible price. And who allowed inflation to climb in the first place in these thirteen year of Tory Government? It certainly wasn't the fairies at the bottom of the garden."

ends

Note to Editors: See attached table which details rise in Pendle unemployment since January 1990. Last month there were 293 vacancies notified to the Job Centres in Colne and Nelson (94 and 199 respectively). Nationwide the unemployment total today reached a new five year high of over 2.8 million.

For Immediate Release: 5 October1992
NS37/92

POLLUTION WATCHDOG GIVES THUMBS DOWN TO ORIMULSION

Orimulsion, the controversial bitumen based fuel that National Power plans to burn at Padiham Power Station, has failed to satisfy the Pollution Inspectorate that it is safe. There are fears the fuel would cause environmental damage and threaten the health of people living in the area.

A leading opponent of the fuel, local MP, Gordon Prentice, welcomed the announcement but said the battle was far from over. "The Inspectorate have put National Power's plans on hold, that's all. They say more work needs to be done to make the fuel acceptable. But the plain fact is that Orimulsion is a filthy fuel that contains heavy metals and more sulphur than the dirtiest coal ever mined. It is simply unacceptable for this to be burned here."

"If it's so safe let National Power burn it in the constituency of Huntingdon where the sooty plume can descend on the Prime Minister's house."

ends

For Immediate Release: 5 October 1992
NS38/92

MP TELLS *UK WASTE* "WE DON'T WANT YOUR RUBBISH!"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has told UK Waste - the London based company that wants to turn Moor Isles farm into a rubbish tip - to think again.

Earlier this week, Prentice told a meeting of the Reedley Branch of the Pendle Labour Party - which covers the threatened site - that his meeting last month with Directors of UK Waste at the Head office in London had done nothing to reassure him.

Prentice said: "There are a million and one reasons why this site is unsuitable. The geology is unstable. The dangers of pollution are high. The disturbance and aggravation caused to local people throughout the twenty year life of the tip is simply unimaginable. But what staggers me is that the company had made no contingency plans should the application to turn Moor Isles into a rubbish tip be unsuccessful.

"The Company tried to sell the line that the North west is bursting at the seams with garbage and the existing capacity will run out within the next five years or so. But if that is indeed the case why is it that a number of possible alternative sites are not being looked at? Is it because Moor Isles is cheaper to develop? UK Waste seems to be putting all its eggs in one basket - a singularly inappropriate thing to do for any commercial organisation."

Prentice has lodged an objection to the proposal to site the rubbish tip at Moor Isles and intends to raise the issue in the Commons.

ends

For Immediate Release: 5 October 1992
NS39/92

PRENTICE CALLS FOR CUTS IN THE CIVIL LIST

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, launched a stinging attack on "a grotesquely bloated Civil List" at last week's Labour Party Conference in Blackpool.

Prentice - who is no stranger to controversy on this issue - told two thousand delegates in Blackpool's Winter Gardens that the amount of money given to an ever extending royal family could not possibly be justified. "No other European monarchy has such a swollen and expensive Civil List" said Prentice. "How can £250,000 to the Duke of York every year be justified? And what about all the others? The Edwards and the Alices and the rest?"

"What is absolutely unacceptable to me is that I cannot even discuss these matters in Parliament. - nor vote on them. Under the terms of a secret deal put together by John Major in 1990, the Civil List was doubled from £4m to £8m and is to be uprated annually by 7.5% every year for the next ten years - no matter what the prevailing rate of inflation. There used to be an annual debate in Parliament on the Civil List but now we no longer even get that."

"If people want to suck toes that's a matter for them. But the taxpayer shouldn't be asked to foot the bill" quipped the MP.

ends

For Immediate Release: 5 October 1992
NS40/92

DEFENCE DIVERSIFICATION CALL BY MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called for Government action to help the region's ailing defence industries.

Prentice told a meeting of top managers at the Royal Ordnance plant at Blackburn in a visit today that firm backing and support for a programme of diversification was essential to ensure the defence industry's long term survival.

Prentice said: "The skills are available and there is an enthusiastic and committed workforce. But they can only do so much on their own. We need a programme of defence diversification that will guarantee the long term survival of plants such as the RO at Blackburn."

"Now that the Cold War has thawed, we need to channel the expertise of the people in the defence industry into new areas. I know that RO has a number of exciting projects on the drawing board but I am sure they need the help and encouragement of the Government to turn good ideas into profitable projects."

ends

Note to Editors

Royal Ordinance employed over 16,000 people in the mid eighties when it was privatised and acquired by British Aerospace. The workforce is now down to the 8,000 mark. In Blackburn, the numbers have plummeted from 1,750 down to 500.

For Immediate Release: 5 October 1992
NS41/92

MP DEMANDS HOLIDAY CASH REFUND

Pendle holidaymakers who lost hundreds of pounds - as well as their holidays - when the tour operator ***Land Travel*** went bust during the summer are hoping the intervention by local MP, Gordon Prentice, will help them get their money back.

A top level meeting between the MP and Consumer Affairs Minister, Baroness Denton, is set to take place later this month. Prentice will be demanding compensation for his constituents whose holiday dreams were dashed when the company suddenly collapsed and left thousands of people stranded on the continent.

Prentice said: "The more I have delved into this affair, the more shocking the revelations become. I shall be demanding an independent inquiry to report on the failure in 1991 of the then Consumer Affairs Minister, Edward Leigh, to act on a letter from Boston Conservative Club which identified bad debts and an illegal failure to file accounts. This should have led him to examine the auditor's heavily qualified accounts and their view in 1991 that the company was not viable. Pendle holidaymakers are being asked to pay for the Government's lethargy, complacency and incompetence and that is simply not on." Prentice is demanding appropriate compensation for the 40,000 victims of the collapse.

Note to Editors: Last month it emerged that ***Land Travel*** looked set to re-emerge under a different name. Prentice said: "It beggars belief that a new

travel company, ***Tours Direct***, can emerge phoenix-like from the ashes of the old. The new company will be selling coach trips on the continent - just like Land Travel. If the collapsed ***Land Travel*** can walk away from its responsibilities and twelve of its former managers set up shop under a different name, there needs to be the closest possible scrutiny of the new company, its financial resources and assets, the competence of its directors and senior managers and its overall fitness to sell holidays to the public. Tighter regulation is clearly essential."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP 071 219 4011 (House of Commons)

For Immediate Release: 14 October1992
NS42/92

MP GIVES FOREIGN OFFICE NAMES OF MURDERERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has told Foreign Office Minister, Mark Lennox Boyd, the names of two individuals who may have been involved in the brutal shooting of Mohammed Afzal, the Nelson driving instructor who was slain in his home village of Jaurah on 4 October.

Prentice said: "I want the Foreign Office and the authorities in Pakistan to act - and to act fast. This is not simply "*a police matter"* as the Foreign Office puts it - which can safely be left to the local police. Mr Afzal was a well respected Nelson man and we owe it to his memory and to his wife Elizabeth to track down the killers and bring them to justice.

"That is why I have asked the Foreign Office to tell me specifically what actions they took in reponse to my letter of 8 October when I first learned about the shooting. And now that I have been able to supply the names of possible suspects I want an assurance that the investigation will be conducted with energy and determination. No stones must be left unturned."

Mr Afzal's brother, Zafar Iqbal, was also gunned down but survived the attack. He has now left hospital and is recovering at a "safe house" in the area.

Note to Editors

The MP has also contacted Interpol for help in the investigation.

For Immediate Release: 20 October 1992
NS44/92

NO JUSTIFICATION FOR PIT CLOSURES says Prentice

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has told hundreds of his Pendle constituents that there is "absolutely no justification for the Government's pit closure programme."

Speaking ahead of Wednesday's Common's debate on the coal industry, Prentice said the reasons advanced by the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, were entirely bogus. "No independent expert has come forward to support the Government's line; no-one has proved conclusively

that coal is more expensive than alternative fuels and anyone with two neurons in their brain would realise that the market was rigged by the Tories at the time of electricity privatisation."

Prentice continued: "At my weekend surgery, the feeling of outrage was palpable. I have never experienced anything like it. I had been submerged under sackfulls of mail from people throughout Pendle telling me the closures, the run downs and the redundancies have simply got to stop. I had one woman - previously a staunch Conservative voter - who told me that if the closures went ahead she would not - in all conscience - be able to vote Conservative again. This was typical of the sense of betrayal felt by so many people.

"I want to see an inquiry by the House of Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee before any further action is taken by the Government. And I want to see those Tory MPs who have been wearing their hearts on their sleeves to stand up and speak out and vote against the closure plans in the Commons tomorrow."

ends

For Immediate Release: 14 October 1992
NS43/92

NORWEB BACKS DOWN ON ELECTRICITY ADVANCE PAYMENTS

The privatised regional electricity monopoly, Norweb, is thinking again about its policy of extracting advance payments from struggling North West industries for electricity they haven't used.

Prentice told the electricity watchdog ***Offer*** that a local manufacturer who had never defaulted on a bill had received a demand for £3,500 - for electricity that hadn't been used.

Prentice commented: "It was a straightforward case of extortion. As I said at the time, this kind of 'cash up front' demand could easily make the difference between a firm staying in business or going under. It is good to know that the electricity watchdog agrees with me and is prepared to bark - if only now and again.

Note to Editors:

Over the last four years electricity profits have shot up by 150% while inflation has gone up 31%. That is equal to £58 excess profits for every Norweb customer.

"Norweb's profit increase last year was the highest in England. their profit increase over the last four years was the third highest in England. Over the period since electricity privatisation was announced in 1986, Norweb's standing charges have gone up by 64% - the biggest increase in the whole country.

For Immediate Release: 20 October 1992
NS45/92

PENDLE JOBLESS STILL RUNNING AT RECORD LEVELS says Prentice

Pendle's unemployment is running out of control according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The official figures for September show that 3,216 people were out of work and claiming benefit. This represents 8.3% of the workforce.

Prentice said: "The latest figures represent a slight dip in an upward trend that has been accelerating every month since John major became Prime Minister. People everywhere are waking up to the fact that the hemorrhage of job losses has to be staunched. Here in Pendle, we simply can't exist on a steady drip feed of closures and redundancies.

"The September figures represent the third highest monthly total since I started my ***Pendle Job Watch*** in January 1990. It is the sixth month in a row when the figures have breached the 3,000 mark. I would like to think the latest figures represent the start of a recovery but I know that is not the case. Job losses in the pipeline will push the figures even higher. The Tory record on unemployment is simply grotesque.

Note to editors

Unemployment in Pendle has almost doubled since John major became Prime Minister. Registered vacancies for September at the two Job Centres in the constituency were 115 (Colne) and 216 (Nelson).

Pendle Job Watch enclosed.

For Immediate Release: 20 October1992
NS46/92

PRENTICE CALLS FOR COMMONS DEBATE ON *LAND TRAVEL* FIASCO

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing for an early Commons debate on ***Land Travel*** - the holiday firm that went bust in July shattering the the holiday dreams and taking the money of 40,000 people nationwide.

The move by the Pendle MP followed a meeting earlier today with Baroness Denton, the minister responsible for consumer affairs.

Prentice said afterwards: "The stonewalling by the Government has got to stop. I have constituents who have lost considerable sums of money because of the Government's incompetence and I am not going to accept what I have been offered today - and that was precisely nothing! No independent inquiry and no compensation despite the incontestable fact that the Department of Trade and Industry had information which pointed to the imminent collapse of this firm.

"The minister couldn't even tell me what the procedures are for triggering a Department of Trade and Industry investigation into a company on the ropes. And she is the minister responsible!

"I have also demanded an investigation into the role of **General Accident**, the Perth based insurance company that sold insurance cover to the unsuspecting holidaymakers. That cover was withdrawn 24 hours before Land Travel went under and the insurance cover that people paid for in good faith was worth absolutely zilch. I am fed up with the Government's pass the

parcel attitude - that it is everybody else's fault but theirs - so I shall be seeking to raise these matters on the floor of the House of Commons."

Note to Editors

Prentice told this paper last week: "The more I have delved into this affair, the more shocking the revelations become. In 1991 the then Consumer Affairs Minister, Edward Leigh, failed to act on a letter from Boston Conservative Club which identified bad debts and an illegal failure to file accounts. This should have led him to examine the auditor's heavily qualified accounts and their view in 1991 that the company was not viable. Pendle holidaymakers are being asked to pay for the Government's lethargy, complacency and incompetence". Prentice is demanding appropriate compensation for the 40,000 victims of the collapse.

Policy Statement from Labour's Consumer Affairs Policy Unit is enclosed.

For Immediate Release: 22 October1992
NS47/92

MP URGES SMOKERS TO GIVE IT UP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has urged his Pendle constituents to kick the habit and give up smoking. Prentice - who used to get through a packet a day - was shocked by new statistics from the Health Education Authority.

Prentice said: "I know from personal experience just how hard it is to stop but these figures literally take your breath away.

Every year about 1099 people die in Pendle and a new survey shows that of these 205 (18.6% or one in five) die because of their smoking.

Note to Editors

• An estimated 503 Pendle people were admitted last year to an NHS hospital because they had an illness caused by smoking.

• These patients used an average of 25 hospital beds every day at an annual cost to the NHS of £1.05m

For Immediate Release: 20 October 1992
NS48/92

NORTH WEST FACES MANUFACTURING CRISIS says Pendle MP

The North West of England is facing a massive contraction in its manufacturing base according to Labour MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice told a meeting in Barnoldswick last weekend that the entire region was losing jobs and orders hand over fist. "The Manchester Chamber of Commerce has reported a huge slide in confidence and this is reflected throughout the North West. The survey - covering the period July to September 92 - showed that nearly all signs of improvement in trends over the past 12 months

have been wiped out. We are back to square one. In fact it is worse than that. Manufacturing investment has been cut and more than 80% of companies have spare capacity.

"The Government's decision on the coal industry was the straw that broke the camel's back. The country is no longer prepared to accept a never-ending recession and the destruction of our industries.

ends

Note to Editors

Chamber of Commerce survey see Financial Times 13 Oct 1992

• Manufacturing employment in the North West has contracted by 37% since 1979. (See table)

• The North West is leading the country in the number of mortgage repossession orders between 1990 -91. Business failures are up 23% from 91-92 (See table)

For Immediate Release: 22 October 1992
NS49/92

MP CALLS FOR A BIT OF HUSH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a Commons move to fine noisy people who disturb their neighbours peace and quiet.

The Early Day Motion proposes a new offence of *"Night Noise Nuisance"* for people who make a racket between 9pm and 7am. The minimum penalty would be £500.

Prentice said: "For too long inconsiderate people have got away scot free. They make a tremendous din and commotion and cause untold misery to people living around them. The law as it stands at present is totally inadequate - and polite requests to people to keep the noise down never seem to work.

"What is need is tough action against the tiny minority of people who are deaf to the consequences of their actions. I have to deal with constituents who tell me they are being driven up the wall by noisy neighbours. I say to the noisy brigade "Pipe down or else!"

Note to Editors
The text of the EDM reads: "That this House welcomes the interest shown recently by the Department of the Environment and the Home Office in the problem of noise pollution and noisy parties, which cause such severe distress to many people across the country; notes however that the current powers and fines continue to be viewed as ineffective by the professionals who have to deal with these problems; therefore urges the Government to introduce a new offence of Night Noise Nuisance for severe noise problems occuring between the hours of 9 p.m. and 7 a.m., carrying a minimum penalty of £500, reflecting the number of citizens disturbed; and in addition urges that a full review of the practical problems associated with the enforcement of current laws should be undertaken without delay by a panel of environmental health

officers, the police and representative pressure groups namely those who suffer from or who are directly concerned with tackling the problem".

For Immediate Release: 26 October 1992
NS50/92

KILLERS GIVEN SHELTER BY TOWN HALL CHIEF says PRENTICE

The alleged murderers of Nelson driving instructor, Mohammed Afzal, are being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal has now returned to the UK and, although desperately ill, is now off the critical list.

Prentice said: "I spoke to Zafar on Saturday and find it astonishing that he survived such a murderous attack. He was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers. His brother, tragically, died instantly."

Prentice added: "Zafar is a key witness and he is now in safe hands. On 14 October I passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister responsible at the Foreign Office. He has since told me that "the shooting incident is...a purely internal matter and the High Commission cannot become formally involved without causing resentment". So far as I am concerned that's just too bad. I have today written to the Minister to say that the murder of one of my constituents, a British citizen, and the wounding of another is too important to be side-lined by diplomatic niceties.

"I have now furnished the name and address of the individual who is allegedly sheltering the killers and he should be immediately interviewed by the Pakistani authorities. If he has got nothing to hide he has nothing to fear but I want a full report on the conduct of the investigation and I will not stop until I get it."

Prentice continued: "I have also today written to the local police here in Pendle, formally to request them to interview the surviving brother and to help the Pakistani authorities bring the killers to justice.

ends

For Immediate Release: 26 October 1992
NS51/92

MP THANKS PARENTS FOR VOTE AGAINST OPT OUT

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed the result of the controversial opt out vote at Park High School in Colne. Last week, parents gave the thumbs down to the opt out move by a margin of two to one.

Prentice said: "It was a good result on a high turnout. 593 parents were against opting out and 265 in favour on a 67% turnout. The schools that have

ballotted are a self selecting group. Obviously, someone, somewhere decided to go for a ballot - presumably in the belief that the vote would go in favour.

"There has been a tidal wave of misinformation on the so called benefits of opting out. The plain fact is that the opt out schools will not get any more money in the future than LEA schools. The economy is going down the tube fast and over coming weeks there will be big cuts in public expenditure and that's going to affect the education service whether schools are grant maintained or not."

Note to editors

As of 19 October 1992, 621 schools had had opt out ballots. 488 voted to opt out and 133 were against. The number of schools having an opt out ballot form a tiny proportion of the 25,000 schools nationwide.

For Immediate Release: 26 October1992
NS52/92

PRENTICE GETS COMMONS DEBATE ON *LAND TRAVEL* COLLAPSE

The victims of the collapse of Land Travel - the holiday firm that went bust in July stranding holidaymakers on the continent and dashing the holiday dreams of thousands more are to have their plight highlighted in a special House of Commons debate on Wednesday, 28 October.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, a leading member of the group of MPs who have been pressing for a debate will use the opportunity to call for compensation for his constituents and others who have lost their holidays and their money.

Prentice said: "Having spoken to Baroness Denton - the Minister responsible - I can say without fear of contradiction that the Government is culpable. Its handing of the affair and its actions since the collapse have demonstrated a breathtaking incompetence and an insensitivity to the thousands of people who lost their hard earned cash on a company that should never have been allowed to trade in the first place."

ends

Note to Editors: In 1991 the then Consumer Affairs Minister, Edward Leigh, failed to act on a letter from Boston Conservative Club which identified bad debts and an illegal failure to file accounts. This should have led him to examine the auditor's heavily qualified accounts and their view in 1991 that the company was not viable. Prentice says that Pendle holidaymakers are being asked to pay for the Government's lethargy, complacency and incompetence. He is demanding appropriate compensation for the 40,000 victims of the collapse.

For Immediate Release: 26 October1992
NS53/92

PRENTICE CALLS FOR "MASSIVE BACKING" FOR THE PITMEN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called for "people of goodwill" throughout the constituency to sign the national petition against the pit closures and to stick with the miners over the coming three months. He said it was essential the miners were not left high and dry and isolated as the media focus moves to Maastricht and other issues.

Prentice joined fellow Labour MPs at the head of last weekend's march and rally against the pit closures in London. The march was swollen by contingents from Pendle,Burnley and elsewhere throughout the North West. Pendle CLP President, Sally Lambert, led a group from the area.

Prentice said: "The whole pit closures programme is an absolute fraud based on fiddled figures and funny "facts". We shall not let go of the issue here in Parliament - and in the constituencies we will be mobilising public opinion as never before. My mailbag has never been bigger and I want everyone in Pendle who cares about the miners, their families and communities to sign the national petition. I say to everyone who has been sickened by what has happened "Don't forget the miners. They need you."

ends

Note to Editors: There will be a march and rally for the miners on Saturday 14 November at 1pm in Nelson, Lancashire. Speakers to be confirmed.

For Immediate Release: 28 October1992
NS54/92

PRENTICE CALLS FOR BAN ON COLUMBIAN COAL IMPORTS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to ban the import of Columbian coal which has been mined by cheap labour and child labour.

Recent press reports have revealed that children have been used to dig the coal which has then been imported into this country.

Prentice said: "The Foreign Office Minister, Douglas Hogg, had the effrontery to tell the Commons today that none of the Columbian coal imported into Britain had been mined by child labour. How on earth does he know? And how is British Coal expected to compete with coal mined under slave labour conditions?"

"Every day some new horror story comes to light. Now we are told that Polish coal is to be imported into Scotland and Cornwall to meet the shortfall from pits shut as part of the closure programme. And we have this on the authority of British Coal's chairman.[1]

ends

Note to Editors: The Commons Early Day Motion reads: That this House totally condemns the importation of foreign coal and the detrimental effects this has on the British coal industry; condemns in particular the importation of Colombian coal mined by cheap labour and child labour; recognises that the citizens of Great Britain are disgusted by the utilization of Colombian coal mined under such conditions; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to

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[1] The Guardian. p2. 28 October 1992.

condemn this wholly immoral situation and to exert its influence in bringing about the cancellation of all Colombian coal contracts.

For Immediate Release: 29 October 1992
NS55/92

PENDLE HOLIDAYMAKERS LEFT STRANDED BY GOVERNMENT says MP

Pendle holidaymakers who booked with Land Travel - the tour operator that folded in July - have been left high and dry by the Government according to local MP Gordon Prentice.

Consumer Affairs Minister, Neil Hamilton, told the Commons yesterday the collapse of the tour operator was a "regrettable occurrence" but the Government was unable to help.

Prentice - who tackled the Minister in yesterday's late night debate - said afterwards: "My constituents have every reason to be angry and upset. The Government is stuffed full of Pontious Pilates - people prepared to wash their hands of anything that comes before them that requires a bit of compassion and common sense."

"The role of the insurance company, General Accident, is shameful. They led holiday makers up the garden path, believing they had cover and their money was safe. I shall be seeking a meeting with General Accident to pursue the matter further."

ends

Note to Editors: In the Commons yesterday, Prentice said:

Mr. **Gordon Prentice (Pendle):** I shall concentrate on one aspect of the matter, the role of the insurance company, General Accident.

This whole affair is a story of fraud and deception in which thousands of people, including many of my constituents, had their holiday dreams shattered. People such as Mr. and Mrs. Dalby of Carleton Road in Colne lost £500 of their hard-earned money. They were conned into believing that the holidays that they were buying were comprehensively insured and underwritten by one of the insurance giants, General Accident. The price of the holiday specifically included insurance cover, but we now know that the policies were not worth the paper on which they were written.

The travel insurance document, which had the General Accident logo prominent on the cover, gave the appearance of solidity and reliability. Nowhere in the small print did it even suggest the possibility of the company folding. That was not listed in the scheme of general exclusions which included war, invasion, rebellion and so on.

Land Travel required that all its customers be comprehensively insured "for their own benefit and to avoid expense and disappointment" .

However, 24 hours before the collapse of Land Travel became public knowledge, General Accident, in a nifty piece of footwork, withdrew all its insurance cover. One of my local papers, the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph,* was told by General Accident four days ago that it withdrew following a lengthy dispute with Land Travel and not because of any prior knowledge that the firm would collapse. If General Accident expects us to believe that, it must think that we all have pointy heads.

I have several questions for General Accident. What is its responsibility to the thousands of people who paid Land Travel in good faith and on the strength of the General Accident connection? Is that insurance company prepared to underwrite any old fly-by-night operator? What checks did General Accident run on Land Travel? Did it check at Companies house? Does it still underwrite holidays from firms that are trading outside the ABTA umbrella? When did the company first realise that Land Travel was going down the tube, and does it take any responsibility for the misery that has been caused to so many of my constituents?

To date, the silence of General Accident has been deafening. I want a statement from that major insurance company; and, what is more to the point, I want my constituents to get their money back.

For Immediate Release: 2 November 1992
NS56/92

MP HITS OUT AT DISABILITY CASH CHAOS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has lashed out at Government bumbling which he says has blighted the introduction of the new Disability Living Allowance.

Prentice told a meeting in Nelson last weekend that his advice surgeries are packed with people with disabilities - and their relatives and friends - desperately anxious to get the cash they are entitled to.

Prentice said: "I have never before witnessed such ineptitude and confusion on the part of the Government. The Benefits Agency - the executive arm of the DSS - is taking most of the flak but the real responsibility lies with Peter Lilley and the Department of Social Security. He's the man who tied the purse strings in a knot."

"I have people in my constituency who are at the end of their tether. People waiting to hear from the Benefits Agency - literally for months. They get no answer when they write. They cannot get through the switchboard when they ring. And, too often, they just suffer in silent desperation. People have even died while waiting months and months for their DLA to come through."

"There has been all this hype about *Charters* for citizens and patients and passengers. *Charters* for this, that and the next thing. What about a *Charter* for people with disabilities? One that guarantees they get the allowance they are entitled to - before they drop dead from old age. It is about time the responsibility for this chaos is pinned on the person who created it - the bone dry Peter Lilley."

Note to Editors. Disability Living Allowance - the present position.

The initial **Benefits Agency** advertising and information campaign wrote to 1.5 million existing recipients of Attendance Allowance and Mobility Allowance awards, together with 100,000 organisations and individuals in touch with disabled people.

The forecasts supplied by the Department of Social Security have been badly wrong. It was anticipated that in total there would be 137,000 top-up claims. This had been exceeded by the end of April 1992.

In the three months from February to April this year, the **Benefits Agency** received 116,000 DLA claims, 148,000 top-up claims and 183,000 claims for Attendance Allowance from people over 65. This total of around 450,000 was twice the figure for the same period in 1991.

Information on claims received (as of 25th September) is as follows:

	Total Rec'd (since 3.2.92)	Avg rec'd pw (Sept)	Avg Cleared pw (Sept)	Number Outstanding
DLA	300,000	7,800	11,100	93,000
Top up	194,000	1,900	7,500	57,000
AA	347,000	8,300	13,200	92,000

At the end of August average clearance times - 25% of DLA cases cleared in 30 days and only 3% of AA cases in 35 days.

The Benefits Agency has been overwhelmed by the crisis. They have:

* had 800 staff switched from other duties (increase of about 25%)

* increased the overtime worked - equivalent of 250 additional staff

* established new processing units at Preston, Newcastle, Wembley and Manchester

* increased capacity in local rate telephone service (now 62 full-time and 34 part-time staff, where previously 49 fulltime and 41 part-time).

For Immediate Release: 2 November 1992
NS57/92

PRENTICE GOES ON HUNGER STRIKE

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice is to go without food for 24 hours on November 6th 1992 to protest against world poverty and hunger that is costing millions of lives. He will be joining thousands of others across the country in a fast organised by Oxfam to increase awareness of the plight of people in the developing world and raise funds - through sponsorship- for those who are poverty stricken.

Prentice said: "People in Britain care a great deal for those in poorer countries who suffer from hunger, malnutrition and poverty. This is shown by the massive support there is whenever appeals are made to help victims of famine, war and other disasters".

"Global poverty and hunger always seems to be with us - and it needn't be. We live in a world where there are enough resources and food for everyone but despite this 18 million people die of hunger every year. Every day 36,000 children die as a result of poverty. This terrible state of affairs has to be highlighted and taking part in this Fast gives me the opportunity to play a small role in this process".

ends

Note to Editors: Nearly one-fifth of the world's people go hungry. Oxfam contributes funds to over 2000 community organisations world-wide. These organisations aim to improve such things as agriculture, health-care, education, water-supplies and training.

For Immediate Release: 3 November 1992
NS58/92

PRENTICE BACKS MOVE ON KASHMIR

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to give the people of Kashmir the right to self determination. He also wants respected, independent groups such as Amnesty International free access to Kashmir to investigate claims of human rights abuses.

Prentice told a meeting of the House of Commons all-Party British - Kashmir Group that the reports of torture, rape and gross violations of human rights were now too insistent to be ignored by the British Government.

"We must press the Indian Government to hold immediate elections in Kashmir - something they have been promising to do for ages and we must get the United Nations to act on the resolutions it carried almost 50 years ago. And I want to see the BBC and other media allowed into Kashmir to report on the allegations of atrocities. There have been stomach churning reports of the most appalling acts of violence. The people there are paralysed by fear."

Prentice has called for an early debate in Parliament.

Note to Editors: The Commons Early Day Motion reads: That this House records that on 27th October 1947 Indian troops occupied most of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and that 45 years later those occupying forces still remain; calls on Her Majesty's Government to vigorously support the United Nations Resolutions of 1948,1949 and 1960 which upheld the rights of the Kashmiri people to self-determination through a United Nations supervised plebiscite thereby fulfilling the explicit commitment made to the people of Kashmir by Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India; expresses the gravest concern at the reports of human rights abuses in Kashmir, and urges Her Majesty's Government to take the lead in raising these matters in the United Nations.

For Immediate Release: 3 November 1992
NS59/92

MP SLATES "ROYAL VANDALISM"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted Prince Philip for a gratuitous act of "royal vandalism" in ordering the felling of ancient trees in Windsor Great Park.

Press reports revealed the royal plan to axe an irreplaceable three mile long avenue of 17th century oaks, limes and chestnuts in the Park. Felling began a fortnight ago and 60 ancient oaks have been chopped down already or are lined up for the chainsaw. The remaining trees are to go next year.

Prentice said: "The trees were not diseased but were felled because Prince Philip didn't like the view. If this is indeed the case it beggars belief that these orders came from the man who is not only the Park's Chief Ranger but the head of the World Wide Fund for Nature!"

"We are living in 20th century Britain not feudal England and it cannot be right for ancient trees to be chopped down on a Royal whim. I understand that English Nature was asked for their view and initially came out against the controversial proposal. And then the arms were twisted and the organisation caved in.

"The control of Windsor Great Park should be given to the Department of the Environment which has oversight of all the other Royal Parks - but I want to know first who in the Government sanctioned this appalling act of vandalism".

Note to Editors: The story is covered in the Mail on Sunday, 25 October 1992 (Nightmare on Lime Avenue) and in the Independent, 11 September. Prentice has put down questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking what consultations the Crown Estate undertook before felling began of the 17th Century avenue of trees in the Park. He has also asked the Prime Minister to bring forward legislation to amend the Crown Estate Act 1961 so as to vest responsibility for Windsor Great Park with the Department of the Environment

For Immediate Release: 5 November 1992
NS60/92

LIB DEMS "A DISGRACE" says Prentice

Last night's decision by Paddy Ashdown and the Liberal Democrats to support the Government in the so called *"Maastricht Paving debate"* has been slammed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. "It was a nauseating spectacle to see the Liberal Democrats troop into the Tory lobby to rescue the Prime Minister from defeat.

Prentice told a meeting of constituents in Westminster today that the actions of the Liberal Democrats have brought astonishment and dismay to many local people.

"We were three votes away from bringing down John Major - the Prime Minister whose policies are as welcome in Pendle as the Black Death - yet the Liberal Democrats threw him a lifeline. People in Pendle who voted for the Liberal Democrats in April tell me they now feel totally betrayed.

"The vote last night wasn't about Maastricht, it was about John Major. His office let it be known that a vote against the Government could trigger a General Election - a story allowed to run for days by Downing Street without correction or denial. And now, the morning after, the airwaves are crackling with the voices of Kenneth Clarke and Sir Norman Fowler telling the nation that the vote was a personal triumph for John Major and a ringing endorsement of his policies. What a state of affairs!"

Note to Editors: The European Communities (Amendment) Bill has already received its second reading and can go into Committee at any time of the Government's choosing. The "paving debate" yesterday was unnecessary in terms of the legislative process. Since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990, unemployment in Pendle has gone up from 1,708 to 3,216

For Immediate Release: 5 November 1992
NS61/92

SWEATSHOP PENDLE THREAT says MP

The Government's decision to abolish Wages Councils is a slap in the face for thousands of people on poverty wages claims Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. "A look at some of the wages offered at our local Job Centres in Nelson and in Colne shows the extent of the problem."

The MP blasted the Government on the day of the publication of the **Trade Union Reform and Employment Bill**. Prentice says the legislation will strip low paid employees of all protection against unscrupulous employers paying slave labour rates.

My own constituency in North East Lancashire is in a low wage area and this new Bill will offer no comfort whatsoever to many of my constituents struggling on low wages. The Government's answer to a nosediving economy is to drive down wages even lower to undercut the world's sweatshops.

Note to Editors: The plan to abolish the Wages Council system will leave Britain as the only member of the European Community without any minimum wage legislation or legally enforceable wage agreements. Occupations currently covered by Wages Councils offer £2.78p an hour (hairdressing); £2.64p an hour (clothing manufacture) and £3.08p (retail food).

For Immediate Release: 9 November 1992
NS62/92

MP CALLS FOR JUSTICE FOR JAPANESE PRISONERS OF WAR

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to give justice to the survivors of the Far East death camps where thousands of British and allied servicemen perished.

The ex POWs and their families are calling for £10,000 compensation for every survivor, widow or next of kin instead of the derisory once-and-for-all payment of £76.50p that was agreed as part of the 1951 Treaty of Peace with Japan.

Prentice said: "I have ex POWs in my constituency and I know exactly what they think about the insulting amount of compensation that was awarded! I shall be pressing the Government to look afresh at this whole issue which has been sidelined for far too long. The indignities, the suffering and the miseries of years in captivity surely amount to more than £76.50."

Note to Editors: The Japanese Labour Camps Survivors Association of Great Britain says the claim should be pursued in the context of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which predates the 1951 settlement. The Association wants the British Government to negotiate fair compensation with the Japanese Government.

The Commons Early Day Motion reads: That this House joins with the nation in remembering on Sunday 8th November all those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom; calls upon Her Majesty's Government to remember those Japanese prisoners-of-war alive today, still imprisoned physically and mentally by the callous and inhumane actions of Japanese Imperial Forces during the Second World War; records that this continuing sacrifice was deemed in 1951 and still remains worth only £76-50 in final and complete settlement; and reminds Her Majesty's Government that this issue is not closed until survivors receive full and adequate compensation commensurate with the sacrifice, claims which hitherto remain challenged only by the absence of natural justice.

For Immediate Release: 10 November 1992
NS63/92

MP BLASTS AUTUMN STATEMENT

Thursday's Autumn Statement has been lambasted by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice - two days before the Chancellor of the Exchequer unveils his proposals to the House of Commons.

Prentice told a meeting of visiting economists at Westminster yesterday (Monday) that the Autumn Statement would hold few surprises. "Spring has turned into Autumn for Norman Lamont and not a single green shoot has sprouted. If there are signs of life anywhere in the economy, it is only Lamont who can spot them. He is a walking disaster of a Chancellor - kept in the job by a Prime Minister petrified of losing his."

"The key questions for Norman Lamont to answer on Thursday are these. Will the Autumn Statement. stem the tide of job losses and the slump in investment? Will it do anything to revive exports or to rescue the construction industry? And will it stop the decline in our long term competitiveness?"

Note to Editors: Over the past few weeks there has been fevered speculation about the possible contents of Thursday's Statement. Rumoured cuts include cuts or delays in the road building programme (The Independent 5.10.92); restricting or under-rating benefits (Daily Telegraph 24.7.92); cuts in the hospital building programme (Independent 5.10.92); scrapping central government support for local light rail projects (FT 14.10.92); cuts in the DoE housing budget (FT14.10.92); cuts in defence spending (FT 14.10.92); cuts in Overseas Aid (FT 8.10.92); cuts in City Challenge and the urban programme (Ind 5.10.92 2) and taxing invalidity benefits (leaked Treasury document).

The Conservatives have devastated our economy and damaged public finances. Now they are making the wrong choices to deal with the crisis they have created. We have seen:

* **13 years of mismanagement.** Conservative economic mismanagement throughout the 1980s created this crisis.

* **Rising unemployment.** Unemployment is now 2.84 million, a rise of 16% since the Autumn Statement last year. Unemployment in Pendle has close to doubled since John Major became Prime Minister in Novemebr 1990

* **Shrinking Economy.** GDP has fallen by 4.2% since the middle of 1990. Over the same period GDP increased in France by 3.3% and in Germany by 5. 5%.

* **Decline in manufacturing.** Manufacturing industry is being destroyed for the second time in 13 years. Britain is the only EC country where manufacturing investment is lower than in 1979.

* **The PSBR.** In only 3 years, the government has turned a £14.7bn public sector surplus into a deficit of £30-£40bn..
* **The cost of recession.** The cost of rising unemployment and falling government receipts is undermining our public sector. Every person unemployed costs the public sector £9,000 a year.

For Immediate Release: 10.11.92 1992
NS64/92

AFZAL KILLING - MP SEEKS MEETING WITH PAKISTAN AUTHORITIES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is seeking a meeting with Pakistan High Commissioner, Dr Humayun Khan, to get a progress report on the murder hunt for the killers of Nelson driving instructor, Mohammed Afzal. Prentice sent a letter today (Tuesday) to the High Commission requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the case.

Prentice said: "Mohammed Afzal was murdered on 4 October and - despite every effort on my part - I have no idea how the police investigations in Pakistan are going. Getting a trappist monk to say *hello* is easier than getting information out of the Foreign Office so I have decided to go straight to the Pakistani authorities here in the UK."

"In the expectation that Dr Khan will agree to see me, I would want to invite along to the meeting Elizabeth Afzal, the widow of the murdered man, and Mr Afzal's brother, Zafar Iqbal, who survived the murderous attack. I have passed on to the Foreign Office the names and addresses of the alleged killers and the name and address of the man who is allegedly sheltering them.

"Armed with this information, I expected an early report from the Pakistan police but I have heard absolutely nothing. The whole thing seems to be running into the sand and I am not prepared to let the investigation fizzle out. We are talking here about a brutal murder - not about a parking offence. I want action to bring the killers to justice."

Note to Editors: Written Answer (10 November): Mr Gordon Prentice (Pendle) : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps have been take to help the Pakistani authorities to apprehend the killers of Mohammed Afzal in Jaurah village, Pakistan on 4th October.

MR LENNOX-BOYD: Mr Afzal was a dual British-Pakistani national, and the United Kingdom has no standing under international law to intervene in the investigation of his murder, which is being conducted by the Pakistani police. Our High Commission in Islamabad is, however, maintaining contact with the Pakistani authorities.

On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers Mohammed Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal has now returned to the UK and, although desperately ill, is now off the critical list. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

On 14 October, Prentice passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister responsible at the Foreign Office.

For Immediate Release: 12 November 1992
NS65/92

PENDLE JOBLESS DIPS BELOW 3,000

Pendle unemployment in October dipped below 3,000 for the first time in seven months but local MP, Gordon Prentice, has warned against "premature rejoicing".

Prentice said: "I am desperately anxious to see the jobless totals fall but this figure - as my ***Pendle Job Watch*** table shows - simply takes us back to March 1992. I want to know how long it will be before we get back to 1,708 which was the figure John Major inherited when he became Prime Minister in November 1990. And the figure then was much too high."

"Without a fundamental change in the direction of economic policy the outlook is grim. The first Tory recession in the early eighties wiped out 20% of our manufacturing capacity and the second Tory recession - which we are in the middle of now - has destroyed a further 10%. A third of the nation's manufacturing capacity has been lost in a decade and here in the North West it is even worse. 37% has disappeared."

"The Pendle figures mask a disturbing long term trend. Nationally, unemployment has risen for the thirtieth month in a row. Britain simply no longer makes things any more. It used to be the case in this country that we made anything and everything under the sun. But now the Government is hell bent on exporting jobs to our competitors and is closing down huge swathes of British industry. If and when consumer demand picks up it will simply suck in imports the nation can no longer afford to buy. Next year our balance of

payments will worsen dramatically and unemployment will climb throughout 1993. What is happening to our country is a tragedy"

Note to Editors: The ***Job Watch*** table confirms that unemployment tends to rise in the winter months as outdoor work is cut back. There were 114 registered vacancies in the Colne Job Centre in October (September 115) and 368 in Nelson (September 216).

For Immediate Release: 12 November 1992
NS66/92

LANCASHIRE IS BRITAIN'S LOW PAY BLACKSPOT says Prentice

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has dubbed Lancashire the low pay blackspot of Britain.

The MP released latest figures on wage rates in the area ahead of next week's second reading debate on the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill which seeks to abolish the Wages Councils.

Prentice said: "This Government has the nerve to bring forward legislation which will drive down even further the living standards of thousands of my constituents and pretends it is doing them a favour. They say Wages Councils distort the operation of the labour market. What they mean to say is that rogue employers should be free to pay starvation wages if it takes their fancy to do this."

"The figures show that five per cent of all adults in Lancashire earn less than £120 a week (£6,000 a year) for a full time working week compared with 3.9% for Great Britain as a whole. The figures are even worse for Lancashire women who really do get the thin end of the wedge."

	Lancashire	Great Britain
Full Time		
Men	2.6	2.0
Women	9.4	7.3
Adults	5.0	3.9
Part Time		
Men	-	76.4
Women	-	79.9
Adults	-	79.4

(Overtime not included. Latest figures - for April 1992)

For Immediate Release: 12 November 1992
NS67/92

MP DEMANDS NO COVER UP ON IRAQ-GATE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing demands for Government ministers to come clean on allegations that they sought to conceal evidence from the court in the Iraqi arms trial knowing that innocent men might end up in prision.

Prentice said: "As more of this sordid episode comes to light, it becomes blindingly obvious that ministers - at the very highest reaches of the Government - were part of a conspiracy to suppress evidence. The only other explanation is that they were totally incompetent - or were misinformed by their Civil Service advisers - and did not appreciate the consequences for innocent men of their decision to sign the public interest immunity certificates."

"The whole thing is appalling. The judicial inquiry under Lord Justice Scott must leave no stone unturned. It is not just serving ministers who must be brought to account but but former ministers too."

For Immediate Release: 12 November 1992
NS68/92

NO DOWNTURN IN HOUSING REPOSSESSIONS says MP

House repossessions in Pendle have more than doubled over the past five years according to figures released today by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The figures compiled by the Lord Chancellor's Department show that actions for house repossessions at Nelson County Court have soared from 136 in 1987 to 286 last year. The figure for the first three quarters of the current year is 228 - or 285 over the full year.

Commenting on the figures, the MP said: "There is still too much mortgage misery in Pendle but, thankfully, we seem to have hit a plateau. Too many local people have already been forced from their homes because of the deranged policies of this Government. And, nationally, 1.4 million people are trapped in homes that are now worth less than they paid for them. This Tory Government has smashed the housing dreams of hundreds of thousands of people. They are responsible for causing unimaginable heartache to hundreds of Pendle people."

Note to Editors: In 1987 there were 136 actions; in 1988 (207); 1989 (201); 1990 (238); 1991 (286) and 1992 (Q1 - Q3)(228). Pendle has one of the highest rates of home ownership in the country. 86% of the housing stock is private (75% for the North West Region and 76% for England). In the private sector in Pendle, tenure breaks down as follows: 92% owner occupied (87% NW region and 84% England) and 8% rented (13% NW region and 16% England).

For Immediate Release: 16 November 1992
NS69/92

MP "COULD BE HEARING THINGS" - SHOCK REPORT

News just in suggests that local MP, Gordon Prentice, could be hearing things. In the early morning of Saturday 21 November, the MP's ears will be straining to catch any hint of the phantom noises at 25 William Street, Earby.

The MP was approached for help by the householders, Mr and Mrs Barker, who have been driven to distraction by insistent humming noises that start up in the middle of the night. The noise becomes pronounced between 1am and 3am and then disappears again. The Council's Environmental Health

Department investigated and drew a blank and so also did British Telecom whose telephone exchange at Earby was thought to be the culprit. Then the National Sound Research Laboratory was called in. The house was wired up with sophisticated electronic gear but the noise remained undetected.

Prentice said: "I have been in touch with all the sound experts and I have read through reams of paper, studies and reports but there is only one thing for it. I've got to hear this noise for myself. I shall therefore be spending the night with the Barkers, wrapped up in a blanket, with a mug of cocoa - but fully awake and alert."

Prentice said: "My ears are a bit like radar domes. I can pick up a whisper at fifty paces - which is very useful in politics.

ends

Note to Editors: Mr and Mrs Barker asked Mr Prentice to inform the press on their behalf.

For Immediate Release: 16 November 1992
NS70/92

PENDLE'S "CHILD OF COURAGE" TO VISIT WESTMINSTER

Kelbrook girl, Charlotte Slater, is to visit local MP, Gordon Prentice, at the House of Commons on Thursday just 24 hours before filming begins in London for Esther Rantzen's *Children of Courage* special which is to be broadcast at Christmas.

Charlotte, 11, will be accompanied by her dad and coach and will be shown around the Palace of Westminster with her local MP as guide. "I have a few surprises in store which, I hope, will make the day a memorable one for Charlotte" said the MP.

Note to Editors: Two years ago, Charlotte underwent a 10 hour operation to remove a tumour from the middle of her head followed by painful chemotherapy treatment at St James's Hospital, Leeds. Charlotte is one of only five children throughout the country chosen to appear on the Children of Courage and Achievement section of the annual Children in Need fund raising show.

For Immediate Release: 16 November 1992
NS71/92

MPs MAKE THEIR LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

Husband and wife team Bridget and Gordon Prentice, MPs for Lewisham East and Pendle, will be signing on the dotted line on Wednesday 18 November as they each make their last will and testament.

Bridget and Gordon are supporting the *Will Aid* initiative where over 2,000 solicitors nationwide will be giving their time free during the month of November to draft wills for their clients.

Those settling down to the unsettling task of making their last will and testament will be expected to donate £35 to a consortium of development agencies including ACTIONAID, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Save the Children.

Gordon Prentice said: "Making a will is one of those things I've put off doing. I find the mere thought of it a bit morbid. Still, you can't take it with you so I'm going to swallow hard and do the business." Bridget commented: "People think you've got to be retired to make a will but often life doesn't work out that way. This is a marvellous initiative and gets money to developing countries where it is desperately needed."

Note to Editors: 7 out of ten adults do not have a will. The ***Will Aid*** initiative involves a partnership between the development agencies and solicitors which aims to raise over £1m to support work in the Third World.

Photocall at 11.30am in the Jubilee Room, House of Commons on 18 November

For Immediate Release: 24 November 1992
NS72/92

HOUSE OF COMMONS CONGRATULATES CHARLOTTE SLATER

Pendle girl, Charlotte Slater (11), who captivated millions of TV viewers nationwide with her courage in successfully beating cancer - and with her display of gymnastic skills - has received another accolade, this time from the House of Commons.

Charlotte, who appeared in last week's BBC Children in Need special was the subject of an Early Day Motion in the Commons, tabled by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The motion, which was signed by over 50 Members of Parliament paid tribute to Pendle's most famous 11 year old. MP Gordon Prentice said: "Charlotte is a terrific girl. Here in the Commons we are all proud of her."

Note to Editors: EDM attached

For Immediate Release: 24 November 1992
NS73/92

WINDSOR CASTLE FIRE: QUEEN SHOULD PAY says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing demands for the monarch to pay towards the restoration of Windsor Castle which was gutted by fire at the weekend.

Prentice said: "The case for the Queen making a major contribution is incontestable. She pays no tax on a personal fortune of around £6,000,000,000 and the taxpayer is constantly being asked to foot the bill for all sorts of things - whether it is deer fencing at Balmoral or refurbishing the royal trains, boats and planes."

Prentice continued: "In the Commons yesterday, Peter Brooke, the National Heritage Secretary committed the taxpayer to footing a bill which could reach £60m. And he did so without batting an eyelid. And this comes on top of the

£21.6m the royal household gets every year to repair and maintain the royal palaces.

"A number of simple and straightforward changes need to be made. First, there should be a thorough audit of the contents of all the royal residences to show what belongs to the royal family and what belongs to the state. Second, there should be no exemptions or exclusions for royal palaces from the law of the land that runs everywhere else. Third, the monarch should pay tax like the rest of us. I find it simply astonishing that there does not seem to be a publicly available inventory of all the contents of the royal palaces showing what belongs to the nation and what is the private property of the royals."

Note to Editors: On 23 November, Prentice tabled a question to the Secretary of State for National Heritage asking if his Department will carry out and publish an inventory of the contents of the historic royal palaces, indicating what items are public property.

For Immediate Release: 24 November 1992
NS74/92

MP PROTECTS AUNTIE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has issued a call "to protect Auntie" following the publication today of the Green Paper on the future of the BBC.

The Corporation's Charter expires in 1996 and the publication of the Green Paper will herald a period of intense debate about the future of public service broadcasting.

Prentice said: "The blind auction of the commercial television franchises is a terrible warning of what can go wrong when Conservative Party ideologues are let loose on the world of broadcasting. Commercial television was savaged last year and there is now a real danger that regional programming will suffer."

"Some commercial TV companies are on the ropes, struggling to pay vast sums to the Exchequer as a result of Margaret Thatcher's auction of TV franchises. We must make sure there is a full and genuine debate on the future of the BBC. The last thing I want is for the Corporation to be changed out of all recognition."

"The BBC is a national institution funded through the licence fee and that is how it should remain" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 24 November 1992
NS75/92

POVERTY GROWS IN EAST LANCS

Figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show that poverty is on the increase in East Lancashire.

Claims for Income Support - a social security benefit to help people on low incomes and who are not working 16 hours a week or more - have shot up over the past three years.

Figures from the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale offices of the Benefits Agency show the number of claims sky-rocketing from 18,679 in 1989 to 22,654 in August 1992 - up by over a fifth in three years.

Prentice said: "In the Autumn Statement we saw the social security budget spiralling out of control. These figures from our own area show why. The number of people on low incomes is moving up like a ratchet year on year. We have a Government that knows how to create poverty like none other."

Note to Editors: Income Support claims in August 89 (18,679); August 1990 (19,158); August 1991 (20,888) and August 1992 (22,654). Income Support can be paid on top of other benefits such as Unemployment Benefit or if no money is coming into the household at all.

For Immediate Release: 26 November 1992
NS76/92

PHOTOCALL: Friday 27 November

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting Rural Development Commission aided schemes at the times shown below.

- 2.30pm Euravia Engineering and Supply Ltd. Earby. Dennis Mendoros, MD

- 3.30pm Site visit to Crows Nest Industrial Estate. Barnoldswick. Visit premises of Tharstern Ltd, Crows Nest Industrial Site, Keith Harrison MD

- 4.00pm Tourist Information Centre, Barnoldswick. View Town Regeneration Project accompanied by Gillian Jones, Tourism Development Officer, Pendle Borough Council

Note to editors: The RDA writes: Rural Development Areas (RDAs) are the priority areas into which the Rural Development Commission concentrates the majority of its efforts. RDAs were designated in 1984 and are currently being reviewed. In each RDA a Rural Development Programme Committee of interested public and private sector organisations has been established. The Committee advises the Commission on local problems and opportunities which can be tackled in partnership. including local authorities, the private sector, the voluntary sector and local communities themselves. Within Pendle Borough Council the parishes of Brogden, Bracewell, Salterforth, Earby and Barnoldswick are designated RDA.

The Lancashire RDA is generally remote both in terms of distance and travel times from the main centres of population and has a heavy reliance on primary industries. The remoteness of the RDA is exacerbated by the lack of adequate public transport.

For Immediate Release: 26 November 1992
NS77/92

QUEEN TO PAY TAX "IS GOOD NEWS" says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the announcement that the Queen is to be brought within the tax system. The Prime Minister told the Commons today that the matter was currently being discussed between the Palace and the Inland Revenue and that detailed arrangements would be finalised in the new year.

Prentice said: "Those of us who have been arguing for this change for years will have breathed a sigh of relief that the issue is at long last being addressed. After all taxation of the monarch only stopped during the reign of the Queen's father, George VI."

"The Prime Minister told the House that the new arrangements for the distribution of the Civil List would run for ten years. Quite frankly, this isn't on. We need an annual debate and vote in Parliament on the Civil List and we need a Select Committee review of royal finances.

"We have had decades of back of the envelope calculations on the Royal finances. We need to put everything on a professional, fully audited basis. I hope the announcement in the New Year will address the legitimate concerns that many people have."

For Immediate Release: 26 November 1992
NS78/92

PROFITS UP AT NORTH WEST WATER

North West Water today reported increased profits for the half year to September 30. Pre tax profits have risen from £123.7m to £130.7m. Average price rises of 9.3% help boost the profits bonanza.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "We are all used to being soaked by North West Water so these latest figures come as no surprise. In the previously reported figures for the year end to March 1992 pre tax profits were up 7.3% to £230m. We know who is paying for this, the long suffering consumers who were told in May by North West Water's Chief Executive, Bob Thain, that they were likely to face higher bills than anticipated after 1994 because of regulatory changes since privatisation."[1]

"North West Water should give its customers a break. We are bankrolling a luxurious lifestyle for its top directors while paying through the nose for ordinary tap water" said Prentice.[2]

Note to Editors: The average household bill for unmeasured water in the North West was £156 in April 1992. This was made up of a water element (£73) and sewerage (£83). The average measured standing charge in the North West was £99 (£43 water and £56 sewerage). The cost of the water used is, of course,

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[1] The Times 29 May 1992

[2] North West Water is the only water and sewerage company to have resisted calls from OFWAT, the water watchdog, to limit price increases next year. (FT 26.11.92). Dennis Grove, the Chairman of NWW has a share option scheme worth £260,000 (see Sunday Times Magazine 31.5.92)

extra. Source OFWAT.In the North West, water charges have skyrocketted by 41% since 1989. Last year, 900,000 court summonses were instigated by water companies against households with water debts. There has been a massive increase in the number of families who have had their water supply turned off. OFWAT reported that 21,000 households have had their water supplies disconnected during 1991/2. That figure represents a staggering 177% increase in the number of disconnections in just one year.

For Immediate Release: 26 November 1992
NS79/92

NEW LAW ON SUNDAY TRADING PROMISED

News that the law on Sunday trading is to be looked at again by Parliament has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, told the Commons today that Parliament would have the opportunity "to settle the vexed question" of Sunday trading. He said the 1950 Shops Act had no friends left in the House or outside.

Prentice said: "The present law is shot through with anomalies and absurdities and needs a thorough overhaul. Why is it that there are no restrictions on Sunday trading in Scotland, which has a strong Presbyterian tradition? The world hasn't collapsed round their ears. We need to balance the obvious desire for people to use their leisure as they think fit - whether it is visiting the garden centre or shopping for groceries - with the need to protect shopworkers from exploitation."

"If people do not want to work on Sundays they should not be forced to. And if they don't work on Sundays they should not suffer any penalties whatsoever. We need to have firm guarantees on this point."

Speaking of those who argue for no change whatsoever, the MP said: "We've all got to recognise that the world has moved on. We are no longer living in the 1950s where Sunday entertainment meant listening to the Home Service on a valve wireless.

For Immediate Release: 1 December 1992
NS80/92

PENDLE CHURCHES LOBBY MP

Representatives of Pendle churches lobbied local MP, Gordon Prentice, at Westminster today.

The Pendle group joined others from Burnley and farther afield to press MPs to do more to alleviate the homelessness crisis. The initiative was part of the Churches' National Housing Coalition designed to draw attention to the plight of the homeless.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The number of people in Pendle who were accepted by the Borough Council as homeless last year was in the region of 160 but this concealed a tremendous amount of hidden homelessness. Couples who are forced to stay with their families in cramped conditions and

people who are living in tiny rooms in houses and flats which have been sub let."

Prentice continued: "What is needed is more low cost affordable housing at the lower end of the market. Tragically, the local Council is not being allowed by central government to build the new homes that are so desperately needed by local people - especially young people - starting out on life.

"Over the past five years Pendle council has not been allowed to build a single new council house at a time when the number of households on the waiting list has spiralled upwards. In 1991 there were 2,597 Pendle households down for a council house and this year the number has soared to 2,901. And 86% of the council's existing housing stock needs money spent on it to bring it up to scratch. The local council cannot be blamed for the wretched policies of this Government."

Note to editors: On 4 December there will be a "Sleep Out" in Nelson Centre by youngsters from the Ship Project in Leeds Road.

For Immediate Release: 1 December 1992
NS81/92

MP'S *"CHEEK OF THE DEVIL!"* JIBE TO NW WATER CHIEF

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused North West Water Chairman, Dennis Grove, of having the cheek of the devil when he defended large pay increases given to the bosses of the privatised water companies.

Yesterday, water chiefs were told by Environment Secretary, Michael Howard, that they should set an example in pay restraint. Dennis Grove immediately hit back by telling the Financial Times "We have to pay the market rates to get and keep good people. These jobs are very demanding."

Prentice commented: "The plea by Michael Howard can be put to one side for the moment. There is an army of former Cabinet ministers who have accumulated multiple directorships worth hundreds of thousands of pounds a year. There was no talk of pay restraint for Norman Tebbit nor for Nigel Lawson nor Lord Prior nor Peter Walker nor for any number of other Conservative ex ministers.

"But to hear Dennis Grove trying to justify his inflated salary is enough to burst a blood vessel. North West Water is the only water and sewerage company to have resisted calls from OFWAT, the water watchdog, to limit price increases next year. And Mr Grove himself has a share option scheme with NWW worth £260,000. In March this year he received a 15% increase taking his salary to £166,000 a year.

"To suggest that we need to pay "good people" this King's ransom in order to retain them in the depths of the worst recession since the war is, frankly, ludicrous.

For Immediate Release: 1 December 1992
NS82/92

NO-ONE IN THE DOCK FOR LOW PAY

Shock figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show that the Wages Inspectorate - the watchdog set up to guard against breaches of the minimum wage legislation - has not brought a single prosecution in Pendle over the past thirteen years.

The MP commented: "This really is staggering news given the incidence of low pay in the area. Five per cent of all people employed on full time work in Lancashire earn less than £120 a week and for women the figure is 9.4%. There are two conceivable explanations. We either have model employers in Pendle or else the Inspectors are so colossaly overworked that they cannot get round all the employers.

"The Inspectorate has clearly been under-resourced for years as these figures graphically demonstrate. With one inspector to 40,000 wages council employees they were obviously overstretched beyond belief. And instead of beefing up the inspectorate the Government plans to abolish it along with the Wages Councils.

Note to Editors: Prosecutions for breaches under part two of the Wages Act 1986:

Year	Pendle	Lancashire	NW Division	Great Britn
1979	0	0	0	12
1980	0	0	1	8
1981	0	0	1	10
1982	0	0	1	7
1983	0	0	0	2
1984	0	0	0	2
1985	0	0	0	2
1986	0	0	0	3
1987	0	1	2	8
1988	0	0	2	11
1989	0	0	0	10
1990	0	0	1	9
1991	0	0	1	17
1992 to date	0	0	0	11
TOTAL	0		1	9
112				

For Immediate Release 2 December 1992
NS83/92

NORWEB PROFITS UP 11% AS JOBS GO

The privatised regional electricity company Norweb yesterday announced an 11% rise in pre tax profits - up from £33.4m to £37.1m - for the six months to September 30. At the same time, 100 jobs have gone in the company's distribution side. Over the past two and a half years 500 jobs have been lost in distribution.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Electricity privatisation has produced monopoly suppliers who can bleed industrial and domestic

consumers dry. I would like to see companies such as Norweb cuts bills for pensioners anxious about their soaring winter heating bills.

"Privatisation has been an unmitigated disaster for the consumer" said the MP.

Note to editors:-
1. Norweb's Chairman, Ken Harvey, was last year paid £3,173 a week.

2. Share Options granted to Norweb Directors

Director	share options
K.G.Harvey	108,080
B. Benson	46,430
M.G.Falkener	56,633
A.Simmons	54,662
B.J. Wilson	54,662

They can exercise their right to buy shares under the Executive Share Option Scheme for £3.11 between February 1994 and February 2001. Last September, the Mail on Sunday estimated that this represented a profit to date of £51,198 for Kenneth Harvey. Their estimate of the long term value of his share options is £333,448.

For Immediate Release: 2 December 1992
NS84/92

ROYAL ORDNANCE JOBS MUST BE SAVED says Prentice

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told a packed meeting of Royal Ordance workers at Westminster today that their jobs and skills were too important to be needlessly sacrificed.

The MP told the 300 Royal Ordnance workers who were lobbying Parliament on behalf of the 7,500 strong workforce that the peace dividend was here to stay and no-one was hoping for a return to the cold war. "But Royal Ordnance workers have valuable skills and expertise and their work should be refocussed into other areas of manufacture. What is immediately needed are firm orders from the MoD and "baseload" work to keep the plants open and running. They need a breathing space to diversify into other areas."

Note to Editors: What follows has been produced by the RO Trade Union Forum and sets out the case for Government support. "Royal Ordnance workers are lobbying Members of Parliament about the future of the company and the jobs of the workforce. The company is expected to announce substantial job losses and possibly plant closures at the end of this week. The purpose of the lobby is to put pressure on the Government to conclude a successor to the ammunition and equipment purchasing agreement (EPREP)) which expires early next year and for Government support for moves by the company to reduce its dependence on arms related manufacturing.

Following privatisation in 1987, RO has undergone major changes. To cope with intense competition in the defence market RO has cut staff by 64%; reduced delivery times from 15 to 6 months and increased the value of sales per employee by 86%

Royal Ordnance had to change its whole manufacturing and marketing approach to reflect the changed relationship with the MOD. Surplus production capacity, poor plant layout and a lack of quality awareness were just some of the problems that had to be faced. These chances were implemented with the co-operation of the workforce and their trade unions.

While RO has become more competitive, the end of the Cold War has brought new challenges. Already, the MO has cuts its orders for ammunition and propellants by half. The effect on RO could be disastrous: already over twelve thousand jobs have been lost since privatisation and more job losses are expected to be announced at the end of this week. Three manufacturing plants and the London HQ have closed since privatisation and further plant closures are a possibility.

The situation is different to general manufacturing. The changes in market conditions are due to political upheavals throughout the world and therefore a political initiative is required to allow the companies in this sector to adapt.

EPREP

When RO was privatised, the Ministry of Defence concluded an agreement with RO - the Explosives, Propellants & Related Products Agreement (PREP) - in which the MO agreed to buy 80% of such products from RO. The Agreement was essential to give time for RO to reorganise their production systems and reduce costs so as to be competitive in the World defence market.

That reduction in costs - set at 5% per year in the Agreement - has been achieved.

EPREP is due to expire at the end of March next year and RO's employees are concerned that without early agreement on a replacement for it, Royal Ordnance would not be able to survive with 7,000 likely redundancies.

Such an agreement is not favourable treatment. RO needs a level playing field to allow it a fair chance to win orders to supply equipment and ammunition for the Ministry of Defence of good quality and at competitive prices. Without an agreement, overseas suppliers will be able to pick and choose which MO orders they wish to bid for and do so at marginal cost.
Replacing EPREP is essential for RO's future: a new agreement will give RO time to adapt to the post-Cold War defence world and continue its policy of diversification into non defence products and services.

Diversification: a case study

RO is anxious to diversify its production so it is less dependent on the defence market. This is particularly relevant to the Rocket Motors Division of Royal Ordnance.

Rocket Motors Division has been involved in the design, development and deployment of liquid propellant engines and propulsion systems for over twenty years. In recent years, RO has adapted this defence technology for use in space propulsion systems.

There are enormous potential commercial and civil spin off from this work. The largest market is the USA, although penetration of this market is difficult

because it is dominated by a few companies. RO has developed strong links with US companies to develop joint initiatives where appropriate.

The European market presents more readily available opportunities, specifically via the European Space Agency (ESA). Success in Europe depends not only on the quality of RO's work but also on UK Government support. Britain's support for ESA is inadequate and British firms lose out on contracts as a result.

The UK's contribution to ESA in 1991 was just £90.3 million compared to France's £426.3 million, Germany's £350 million and Italy's £261.1 million. The British share of the important Data Relay Satellite programme is only 1% compared to 20% for France, 12% for Germany and 45% for Italy.

Royal Ordnance's future involvement in space research programmes fulfills three very welcome objectives; retention of jobs, diversification into non-defence products and the involvement in a technology with a strong potential for commercial growth.

RO employees want the Government urgently to re-examine and increase its funding of European based space projects with a view to maximising the potential of Rocket Motors Division.

Summary

Royal Ordnance has met the challenges following privatisation

Excess production capacity has been cut with cost reductions of 5% a year for the past 5 years

Huge job losses have already occurred and further redundancies and plant closures would have serious consequences for both individual workers and communities

A successor agreement to EPREP is crucial to the future of RO and to the maintenance of certain basic strategic manufacturing capacity here in Britain, for example into space technology and extending civil markets where it has the necessary expertise, like decommissioning redundant weapons

RO seeks a level playing field and not special treatment

RO wishes to diversify into non defence products but it needs the support of the Government in order to do that."

For Immediate Release: 2 December 1992
NS85/92

COUNCILS "SITTING ON GOLDMINE" THEY CAN'T SPEND says MP

Lancashire local authorities are sitting on a fortune they are not allowed to spend according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Council cash pots result from the sale of council houses, land, property and other assets and the money is sitting in the bank - most of it unable to be used.

Prentice said: "Our local councils have millions of pounds in the bank but the Government only allows them to spend a small proportion of their own money! What a ludicrous state of affairs. At a time when there are thousands of people without a roof over their head and who are crying out for a home of their own, it is pure madness to stop councils spending their own cash to build houses for those in need."

"Norman Lamont's Autumn Statement last month was a typical sleight of hand from the master Tory magician. He said councils could spend future capital receipts from asset sales but didn't mention the existing controls on accrued receipts - which sterilise billions of pounds nationwide - would be kept in place. In a recession, it is just as difficult for a council as for a private individual to sell property. The market has collapsed.

Note to Editors:

Local authorities are allowed to spend 25% of the money they receive from council house sales and 50% of what they get from the disposal of other assets. The figures for Lancashire councils are shown below and set out the position as at 31 March 92. (Source PQ 2.12.92 - information from latest local authority returns). In total, the district councils hold £8,538,000. Including the County Council the total is £10,499,000. The second table
shows the collapse in the number of employees in employment in the construction industry in the North West standard region since 1979. (Source PQ 10.11.92)

Table 1: Capital receipts held by Lancashire local authorities

Council	**£**
Blackburn	0
Blackpool	£1,797,000
Burnley	£1,103,000
Chorley	£600,000
Fylde	£282,000
Hyndburn	£259,000
Lancaster	£385,000
Pendle	**£675,000**
Preston	£138,000
Ribble Valley	£1,044,000
Rossendale	0
South Ribble	£178,000
West Lancashire	£1,237,000
Wyre	£840,000
Lancashire County Council	£1,961,000

Table 2: Employees in employment in the construction industry in the North West Standard Region.

1979	134,000
1980	134,000

1981	122,000
1982	116,000
1983	114,000
1984	114,000
1985	111,000
1986	106,000
1987	107,000
1988	110,000
1989	114,000
1990	113,000
1991	101,000
1992	89,000

For Immediate Release: 9 December 1992
NS86/92

"NO REPORT" ON AFZAL MURDER

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, Mark Lennox Boyd, has told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, that the Pakistani authorities have yet to make a report to the British High Commission in Islamabad about the murder of Nelson taxi driver, Mohammed Afzal, who was gunned down in Jaurah Village on October 4.

Prentice commented: "A full two months after the brutal murder of Mohammed Afzal, we are still waiting for a report from the Pakistani authorities. Its like waiting for Godot. I want to see some sense of urgency injected into this matter in place of the stultifying inactivity we are witnessing.

"On 14 October I gave the Foreign Office the names of the alleged killers and where they can be found but I have heard nothing substantive about the progress of the investigations. I don't know if this information has been followed up and, if so, to what effect. The Foreign Office tell me they are in close touch with the Pakistan police - but about what, heavens knows. I intend to raise the matter on the floor of the House of Commons."

ends

Note to editors: Mr Lennox Boyd confirmed on 4 December that he had not received a report from the Pakistan authorities. He said he would write to the Pendle MP as soon as he received the report. Prentice has tabled a further question to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs asking how many British citizens have been murdered in Pakistan since 1987 and how many police investigations resulted in the trial and conviction of those responsible.

On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers of Mohammed Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal has now returned to the UK and, although desperately ill, is now off the critical list. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

On 10 November the MP sought a meeting with Pakistan High Commissioner, Dr Humayun Khan, to get a progress report on the murder hunt. His approach has been acknowledged but no date has been fixed for the meeting.

For Immediate Release: 9 December 1992
NS87/92

MP SLAMS POLICE CUT BACKS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused Government ministers of "double speak" by talking tough on law and order while ignoring "a tidal wave of crime".

The Labour MP told a meeting on the crime crisis at Westminster today that the thin blue line had never been thinner.

"After all their promises at the Election, we are now told by Home Office Minister Lord Ferrers that police numbers for provincial forces will be frozen next year. Yet the Tory manifesto specifically promised: *We are continuing to increase police numbers... we will continue to give the police the support and resources they need to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently.* To say that in April and to do the opposite now shows a brazenness of Olympic quality."

"Across Britain there has been a 10.8% increase in crime this year and in Lancashire the increase is 11.3%. Since 1978 there has been a staggering 135% increase in reported crime in Lancashire - up from 54,387 notifiable offences to 127,620 in June this year. We are being engulfed in a crime wave of monumental proportions."

Note to editors: The authorised establishment of the Lancashire force on 1 April 92 was 3,229. From July 90 to June 91 there were 114,634 notifiable offences recorded by the Lancashire police. From July 91 to June 92 this had increased to 127,620 - up 12,986 or 11.3%

In Lancashire, in the 12 months to June 92, offences of violence against the person were up 8%; robbery up 37%; burglary up 14%; vehicle crime up 9%; other theft up 23% and fraud and forgery up 11%.

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1992
NS88/92

HIGH IN EAST LANCS

Shock statistics released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show drug abuse is on the increase in Lancashire. The number of people involved in trafficking hard drugs leapt from 20 to 1988 to 104 last year - a staggering five fold increase. People caught in possession of hard drugs more than doubled from 286 to 661.

Prentice commented: "The figures starkly illustrate the extent to which the drug menace has taken a grip on Lancashire. And it is not just hard drugs that we've got to worry about. There is a growing problem with solvent abuse. Young people in the rural areas as well as the towns are sniffing deodorants, glue and all sorts of things. They'll do anything to get a buzz."

"Faced with this epidemic of sniffing and snorting what is the Government's response? They have cut urban programme funding to the East Lancs Solvent Abuse Group who have been doing sterling work to fight this menace. With funds cut they have had to close their valuable *Solvent Abuse Helpline*. If people needing help ring 0254 677493 they will hear an ansaphone tell them the helpline is no longer operating because there is no money to run the service. What a state of affairs! I have written to Health Minister, Thomas Sackville, to ask what plans he has to deal with this menace afflicting Lancashire and the rest of the country. The evidence I have to hand is not encouraging."

Note to Editors: The statistics relate to people found guilty, cautioned or dealt with by compounding for drugs offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Figures are contained in Table A2.6 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Statistics of drugs seizures and offenders dealt with (area tables)" 1988-1991. The figures for trafficking are 20 (1988); 51 (1989); 91 (1990) and 104 (1991). The figures for unlawful possession are 410 (87); 286 (88); 411 (89); 684 (90) and 661 (91).

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1992
NS89/92

MP BACKS MOVE TO SAVE POSTMARK

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to save the local "Burnley and Pendle" postmark. The Post Office is threatening to abolish the area's distinctive postmark when the new Automated Processing Centre in Preston becomes operational.

Prentice said: "I am one hundred per cent behind my local council who have asked for the whole thing to be reconsidered.

"The Government has told us their review of local government boundaries and structure will reflect local communities and local identities. Yet even before we see the product of the Local Government Commission's labours the Post office is dumping Pendle into a new, all embracing, Lancashire and South Lakes postmark. This is not progress. It is the reverse" fumed the MP.

"I have written to Sir Bryan Nicholson, the Chairman of the Post Office, to ask for the proposal to be pigeonholed."

ends

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1992
NS90/92

BENEFITS "SCYTHED" BY GOVERNMENT says Pendle MP

Social security benefits have been cut back massively since 1979 according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP asked the Secretary of State for Social Security to list the social security benefits which had been abolished since the Tories came to office in 1979; those which had not maintained their real value in 1992 prices and those whose availability had been restricted.

"The answer confirms much of what I already know. It is a roll call of the Government's mean mindedness. Benefits whose availability has been restricted include Housing Benefit, Income Support, Industrial Disablement Benefit, Maternity Allowance, Sickness Benefit, Unemployment Benefit, Widowed Mother's Allowance and Widow's Pension.

"Benefits which have not maintained their real value since 1979 include the Age Addition (for those aged 80 or over), the Christmas bonus, Maternity Allowance, Sickness Benefit, Statutory Sick Pay (higher rate) and Child Benefit."

"We are not talking about little cuts here and there. The Government has taken a scythe to a whole swathe of benefits that people used to be entitled to. It's hard luck if you fall on hard times under this Government."

Note to editors: Social Security Benefits abolished since 1979 (a) benefits replaced by reformed schemes - Attendance Allowance for those disabled before age 65, Community Charge Rebate (Scotland), Death Grant, FIS, Housing Benefit Supplement, Industrial Injury Benefit, Maternity grant, Mobility Allowance, NCIP and HNCIP (non contributory invalidity pension and housewives' NCIP), rate Rebate, Special hardship Allowance, Supplementary benefit, Widow's Allowance and (b) - others (cases which existed at the time of abolition remain in payment) - Child's Special Allowance, Industrial Death Benefit and Reduced earnings Allowance.

For Immediate Release: 10 December 1992
NS91/92

MP SLAMS POST OFFICE CLOSURE PLANS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed proposals to close Waterside Post Office in Colne. The Post Office say it is not needed as there are two other post offices within walking distance.

Prentice commented: "This really is the thin end of the wedge. The local post office is a focus for the neighbourhood and if you take it away the community loses something.

"The Post Office is being set up for privatisation and the closure of local post offices is all part of the master plan to dismantle a valued public service. The Government is already planning to hive off Parcelforce - the parcels delivery service - and the rest of the profitable bits will no doubt follow."

Note to Editors: The Post Office has been in profit for each of the past 16 years. It has contributed £750m to the Exchequer over the past ten years. Local post offices account for only a fifth of the Post Office's $5bn turnover and a tenth of its profit.

The Royal mail made a pre tax profit last year of £266m. Commentators suggest that the flotation of Royal Mail may raise £1.5 billion.

The Post Office Users National Council - the postal watchdog - has accused the Government of imposing "unreasonable and uncommercial" financial targets on the Post Office which has been told to hand over an additional £200m to the Exchequer over the next two years. (See FT 10.12.92)

For Immediate Release: 17 December 1992
NS92/92

PENDLE'S NOVEMBER JOBLESS TOTAL LOWEST IN 1992

Last month's jobless total for Pendle at 2,822 was the lowest registered for any month in 1992 - but still 212 higher than a year ago. The November 1991 figure was 2,610.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "It is no consolation that the jobless rate for Pendle at 7.3% is lower than the regional and national rates. Although we have had three consecutive months of falling unemployment in Pendle it is much too early to say we've turned the corner. All the objective evidence points to continuing high unemployment."

Prentice continued: "My Pendle *Job Watch* figures show there were 1,708 (4.5%) Pendle people out of work and claiming benefit when John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990 and I think we ought to put the celebrations on hold until we get down to that figure again. And even that figure was much to high.

"Jobs have been piled on the pyre in 1992. The November figure just in may be the lowest this year but it is still higher than *any* month in the 39 month period from December 91 to September 1988 - when it stood at 2,907. On the vacancies front, things aren't so good. At the Nelson Job Centre there were 236 vacancies in November compared with 368 in October. The figures for Colne are respectively 110 and 114.

"Over the past few weeks major job losses have been announced. Ford, the banks, IBM, British Rail and the Post Office have all signalled big job cuts. And, of course, we wait to see what the Government plans for the coal industry where 30,000 miners' jobs and 70,000 in ancillary industries are threatened."

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1993
Number 1/93

THIRSTY THIEVES ROB MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has had a nasty start to the New Year. His constituency office at 33 Carr Road, Nelson was broken into last week by thirsty thieves who made off with tea bags and ten pounds. The robbers also forced their way into the MP's next door neighbour leaving with a kettle and a microwave.

The stunned MP commented: "It is clearly thirsty work breaking into my Office. The thieves forced their way through three locked doors and came away with a few bags of Typhoo and a few pounds. The police have been down dusting for fingerprints and I am confident the delinquent tea drinkers will be brought to book."

The MP has issued a word of warning to anyone considering a second attempt at Carr Road. "We do not keep money at my Constituency Office but we do

have a good stock of coffee, biscuits and tea which are all freely given to constituents at my surgery".

"But there's trouble brewing for thieves who think they can smash their way into my office in future. I've been looking at the bottom of my tea cup and the tea leaves tell of terrible dangers. I see great perils for intruders in future. Security lamps and burglar alarms are just for starters. In future, you'll have to be Indiana Jones to get into my office after dark" quipped Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 12 January 1993
2/93

MP BACKS MOVES TO SAVE PENDLE FIRE COVER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to prevent cuts in Pendle's fire cover. Under threat are two fire engines - one in Colne and the other at Barnoldswick - which may be axed by the cash strapped County Council.

The MP is joining forces with local firemen to press Lancashire County Council to look again at proposed fire cuts which are to be discussed by the County's Fire Committee on 18 January.

Prentice said: "I have spoken at length to our local firemen who obviously know the fire prevention needs of the area like the back of their hands. We can't afford to take risks with this vital emergency service."

"We all know who the real culprit is in this whole affair. The County Council is being made the fall guy for the policy decisions of the Government who wash their hands of the consequences - and that includes reduced fire cover. Lancashire has been told it needs to spend 7.5% less next year compared with the current year. This central government assessment of what the County should spend is the second largest reduction in all the County Councils. This translates into a capping limit almost 7% below the current year's precept.

"Lancashire is being ordered to act like a limbo dancer. Every year it is expected to wriggle under an ever lower bar.

ends

Note to Editors: The following statement has been sent to the County Council Fire and Public Protection Committee from the officers at Colne Fire Station:

Colne is one of the busiest 2 pump retained stations in the county with over 350 calls in 1992.

Colne is also one of the most efficient and cost effective, providing the equivalent cover of a 2 pump wholetime station for a fraction of the cost. In order to provide this cover, the majority of personnel undertake to give 168 hours cover as we have done since 1947, and plan to do so in the future. The benefits of keeping the 2 pumps at Colne far outweigh any small saving in costs.

The Fire Station at Colne is situated in the centre of Pendle thus enabling the 2 pumps to provide cover and back-up to the two key stations at Burnley and

Nelson, plus Barnoldswick and Earby. We also provide the second pump to all pumps at Cowling.

If the recruitment and manning problems with the retained pump at Nelson reoccur as they have over the years, the 2 pumps at Colne would be able to provide the second pump for fires at Nelson and still leave 1 pump to provide cover for Colne and Nelson. Therefore any reduction in pumps at Colne would not only affect fire cover here but also your commitment to provide fire cover for the Nelson area.

If all the options in the review are carried out, the reduction of pumps in "B" division would not be as stated in the review, but more because of manning levels at certain periods. Surely this would present a serious problem in providing supporting pumps and standby pumps in the busy periods or in the event of one or more serious incidents, leaving large areas without fire cover.

For Immediate Release: 12 January 1993
3/93

PRENTICE SEEKS COMMONS DEBATE IN BID TO FREE LOCAL MAN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is making another bid to free a local man imprisoned 22 years ago for a crime he says he never committed.

On two separate occasions over the past 18 months, Prentice has lobbied successive Home Secretaries - first Kenneth Baker and now Kenneth Clarke - to open the prison door and let Anthony Alexandrowicz (Alex) walk free. But Prentice claims the case is always shuffled to the back of the queue and Alex is no nearer release now than he ever was.

Prentice said: "I have today applied to the Speaker for an adjournment debate on the floor of the House to highlight the plight of this man locked up for nearly a quarter of a century for a crime which, these days, would rarely get more than five years. I have also asked the Home Secretary to meet me to discuss things in depth."

The case of Anthony Alexandrowicz who was jailed in 1971 has been the subject of extensive Press comment as well as a Granada TV documentary. Prentice said: "Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in jail for far too long. Even if he did commit the crime of aggravated burglary - which is a very serious offence - 22 years in prison is surely long enough behind bars to have paid his debt to society.

Note to Editors
Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in prison for twenty two years for a crime which, he maintains, he did not commit. Alexandrowicz was born in Nelson in Lancashire. He had a difficult home life and he was taken into care at the age of 12 because of violence in the family. After he left Approved School he became a small time burglar. When he was 17, he allegedly broke into a house in Preston and stabbed the woman living there in the breast and stomach. She left the hospital the same day as she was admitted.

At the police station he made a confession - which he now says was made under duress. To this day, he maintains he is innocent. At the time, the

psychiatric reports labelled him as someone prone to depression. However, he was not sent to a place where his condition could be treated but to an ordinary prison. He was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for wounding and aggravated burglary. He ended up in Parkhurst as a Category A prisoner. The experience brutalised him and he had a number of run ins with the prison authorities.

In 1988, three prison governors and two psychiatrists recommended to the Parole Board that he should be released. The Parole Board agreed and, in turn, reported to the Home Secretary who turned down the recommendation. The medical evidence confirmed that he was no danger to society.

The Granada TV programme advances one - very far fetched - theory in an attempt to explain the Home Office decision. Alexandrowicz is of Russian extraction. Although he knew his father had served with the Red Army he (Alexandrowicz) knew nothing of his grandparents. When Alexandrowicz was 16 he went to the Soviet Embassy to ask if they could help trace his long lost grandparents. When he was 21, Alexandrowicz applied for Soviet citizenship. The TV programme suggests that this found its way into Home Office files and prejudiced his chance of release from prison.

With all hope gone, he decided to escape from the open prison he was in. He contacted the TV people; gave them his story and then turned himself in. He is now back in prison - along with some 300 discretionary life prisoners who are now eligible for review under the new Criminal Justice Act 1991. The Home secretary told Prentice on 5 November 1992 "It is for the Parole Board to decide the order in which these cases are heard. To assist in this task, the Board is provided with a list of those eligible in each prison establishment... Mr Alexandrowicz will be notified as soon as his case is listed for hearing."

For Immediate Release: 13 January 1993 No: 4/93

MP BACKS MOVE FOR RE-THINK ON COUNCIL CASH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today joined an all-Party delegation of local councillors in a bid to persuade Local Government Minister, John Redwood, to look again at Government calculations which will force the council to make big cuts in services next year.

The delegation, led by Council Leader Susan Nike, included Jim Dodd, Alan Davies, Roy Clarkson and Chief Executive Stephen Barnes. They told Redwood in his 15th floor office at the Department of the Environment's HQ in London that a whole series of technical factors, adding up to £300,000, had completely distorted the Government's assessment of what the Council should be spending in 93/4. They warned that unless changes were made to the Government's figures there would be big increases in Pendle's Council Tax.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said after the meeting: "The Minister listened with courtesy to what the councillors and Chief Executive had to say and I am hopeful there will be some movement. The Council put together an impressive case."

Note to Editors: The Government's assessment of what all local authorities need to spend to provide a standard level of service across the country for the

year from April 93 onwards (the Standard Spending Assessment) was increased by 2.9%. The increase for all district councils was 2.2% but Pendle's SSA increased by less than one half of one percent - by 0.45%.

The Government's financial settlement does not reflect the costs of carrying the new burdens placed on councils (such as the implementation of the Environmental Protection Act).

The transitional relief scheme, designed to cushion the impact of the changeover from the Poll Tax to the new Council Tax is seriously underfunded with many households in Pendle facing the prospect of increases of more than 30% in their bills.

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1993
5/93

AFZAL MURDER -MP'S MEETING GETS GO AHEAD

The Pakistan High Commission has given the go ahead for a meeting to discuss progress of the investigation into the murder of Mohammed Afzal - the Nelson taxi driver who was gunned down in Juarah Village, Pakistan on 4 October last year.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I have now heard from the Acting High Commissioner, Khalid Shafi, and a meeting is now being arranged. I want to bring with me the murdered man's widow, Elizabeth, and his brother Zafar Iqbal who survived the murderous attack. The evidence I have to hand and the presence of a key witness should be enough to ensure the killers are caught and brought to justice. After months of getting nowhere, at last we seem to be making some progress."

Note to Editors: On 10 November Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps had been take to help the Pakistani authorities to apprehend the killers of Mohammed Afzal in Jaurah village, Pakistan on 4th October. The Minister (Mark Lennox Boyd MP) told the MP: "Mr Afzal was a dual British-Pakistani national, and the United Kingdom has no standing under international law to intervene in the investigation of his murder, which is being conducted by the Pakistani police. Our High Commission in Islamabad is, however, maintaining contact with the Pakistani authorities."

On 14 October, Prentice passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister responsible at the Foreign Office. On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers Mohammed Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal has now returned to the UK and, although desperately ill, is now off the critical list. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1993
6/93

COUNCIL TAX HAS NEW HORRORS IN STORE FOR PENDLE says Prentice

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, claims the new Council Tax could be even worse than the Poll Tax for thousands of Pendle people. The MP says many house valuations, based on their value on 1 April 1991, "bear no connection with reality".

The new tax, which is to be introduced in April, is based - in large part - on the value of property. The valuation exercise, which cost £1.76p per property, was carried out by local valuers and estate agents under contract from the Government. Prentice said: "The whole thing has been done in a very rough and ready manner and many people are now waking up to the consequences. I know of people shocked to find their home placed in the the top band G - producing a household liability double that of the Poll Tax."

The MP continued: "I am keeping my fingers crossed that the Government listens to what the local borough council has to say about possible Council Tax levels. Unless the Government looks again at Pendle's spending needs we could see some colossal increases of 30% plus between what some Pendle households pay in Poll Tax and what they will be paying in Council Tax."

end

Note to Editors: Single people - *regardless of the value of their home or their income* - are entitled to an automatic 25% reduction in their Council Tax. People who are unhappy with the valuation band given to their property can appeal to the Valuation Office Agency. Appeals have to be made between 1 April 1993 and 30 November 1993.

The Halifax House Index shows that House prices in the North West fell by 5.9% (a cash fall of £3,669 in the North West) between the second quarter 1991 and the third quarter 1992.

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1993
7/93

PRENTICE WARNS OF BIG CUTS IN LEGAL AID

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has warned that the big changes in legal aid, announced in the Autumn Statement, would rob millions of people of the chance of legal remedy and make the courts a "no go area" for thousands of his constituents. The Law Society has estimated that over 7 million people will lose entitlement to legal aid under the proposals.

Prentice said: "The changes are a crippling blow to a scheme designed to make the law accessible to all and not just to the rich who can afford it. The Law Society has calculated that those now contributing towards legal aid (including those who are just on the free limit) will pay a minimum of £280 more if the Government's proposals are implemented. For some it is much worse than this.

"According to the Law Society, a single parent with two children who presently pays £30 will pay £479 in future. These are bone crunching increases" said the MP.

Note to Editors: In the Pendle area (part of Legal Aid Area 7), the number of people who received legal aid for advice and assistance for divorce has dropped from 18,531 (87/8) to 16,867 (91/2). The number of Legal Aid orders made in the Lancashire ands Northern Circuit dropped from 12,639 (87) to 10,889 (91). Orders made at the Pendle Magistrates Court and the Crown Court at Burnley increased over the same period from 670 to 737.

For Immediate Release: 18 January1993
8/93

PENDLE STUDENTS VISIT WESTMINSTER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be giving the red carpet treatment to a 16 strong group of students from Mansfield School when they visit the House of Commons next week.

The visit, which was planned before Christmas, is one of a number scheduled for local students keen to see the workings of Westminster at close hand.

The MP said: "I'm looking forward to meeting the students and showing them some of the weird, wonderful and unusual features of this place. And that's just the MPs" quipped Prentice. "There is a serious side of course. It is important for students - and, indeed, every citizen - to know where the power lies in our society so it can be made accountable and open to scrutiny."

Note to Editors: Schools wishing to arrange visits to the House of Commons should contact Gordon Prentice MP by letter either at the Commons or at his constituency office at 33 Carr Road, Nelson.

For Immediate Release: 19 January 1993
9/93

SUNDAY TRADING - PENDLE MP BACKS REFORM

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to change the law on Sunday trading and plans to vote against Ray Powell's private members Bill due for second reading this Friday (22 January).

The Powell Bill - supported by Keep Sunday Special - will prevent a large part of the retail trade operating on Sunday. The Government intends to introduce its own Bill setting out a series of options from total deregulation (as is currently the case in Scotland) through the spectrum to restricted shopping.

Prentice said: "The Ray Powell Bill is shot through with anomalies and it will perpetuate the ridiculous distinctions and confusions of the 1950 Shops Bill. At the moment it is possible to sell legally a pornographic magazine on a Sunday but not a bible; fresh peas but not frozen peas and any take away from a fish and chip shop - so long as it isn't fish and chips! That's straight out of an Ealing comedy!

"The Powell Bill will close many garden centres and DIY Stores. And it will close down car boot fairs, antique markets and Sunday markets. It is replacing one unenforceable law with another" said the MP.

"Hundreds of thousands of people already work on a Sunday - in hospitals, in hotels and restaurants, in transport - and even in the retail trade stock-taking and delivery work often takes place on a Sunday. It is about time we recognised that millions of people see shopping as a leisure activity and want to do it on a Sunday. To pretend otherwise is to close our eyes to what is happening around us.

more follows

Prentice continued: "However, it is absolutely essential that people are not forced to work on Sundays if they do not want to - and the safeguards need to be written on the face of the Bill. Many people will not wish to work on Sundays - perhaps for religious reasons or because they wish to spend time with their families and that is their absolute right. And if people do wish to work on Sundays they should do so at premium rates."

"What I am not prepared to do is vote to turn the clock back and replace one discredited law with another."

For Immediate Release: 19 January 1993
10/93

SMITH & NEPHEW CLOSURE "DEVASTATING" says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has described today's news that Smith & Nephew are to pull out of denim manufacturing - with the loss of 574 jobs - as a devastating blow for Pendle and the local economy.

The decision means that S&N's workforce in Pendle will almost be halved. Prentice said: "This news has really shaken me. I have been hoping upon hope that at last the country was pulling out of recession and that somewhere there was a bright spot on the horizon - and now we have this.

"I have asked the Speaker for an urgent debate on the situation on the floor of the House. If S&N press ahead with their plans, Britain will no longer be making denim - a sobering thought given the millions of people who wear clothes made from this material.

"I shall be meeting the senior management of S&N later this week and I shall be writing to the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine. The whole thing is an absolute tragedy."

Note to Editors: 574 redundancies will cost the Exchequer over £5m in lost taxes and increased social security and employment benefit. The cost is £9,000 per unemployed person.

For Immediate Release: 19 January 1993
11/93

PRENTICE CALLS FOR YOUNGER JUDGES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has taken a side swipe at the judiciary - calling for a mandatory retirement age of 65 rather than the 70 years proposed by the Government.

Prentice told the Standing Committee on the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Bill that judges were totally unrepresentative of ordinary people and could as well come from the planet Mars or the far side of the moon for all the experience they bring of how most people live their lives.

"There are two female High Court judges and two Black judges. In a survey of 527 judges 165 were over 65 - the state retirement age for every other public employee. They come from immensely privileged backgrounds and no-one knows how on earth they get on the bench. They just materialise out of the ether wearing a wig and a red gown. There is no publicly available selection criteria -
so we don't know if the people who end up on the bench have the razor sharp legal minds we are invited to believe they have - or whether they are members of the Garrick and know the *right* people."

Prentice said: "We all value integrity and competence and the independence of our judiciary. But we also need judges much more representative of the community. One quarter of all judges are members of the Garrick Club. That sums up the problem."

Note to Editors: 9 out of 10 House of Lords judges are over 65 and 15 out of 31 Court of Appeal judges. In a survey of 404 judges on the circuit bench 112 out of 382 were over state retirement age (there was no information on 22). 19 are over 72.

or Immediate Release: 22 January 1993
13/93

PENDLE JOBLESS BACK OVER 3,000

The December unemployment total for Pendle is back over the 3,000 mark after falling back from a high of 3,355 in August last year. The news was greeted with dismay by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The December jobless figure is up to 3,006 - or 7.8% of the workforce in Pendle. It compares with a jobless total of 1,708 in November 1990 when John Major became Prime Minister.

Prentice said: "I have been praying for the downward trend to continue but what we saw at the tail end of last year was simply a blip in the figures.

Unemployment is accelerating here in Pendle and across the nation. Next month will see the 3 million mark being broken."

"The misery behind these cold statistics just doesn't bear thinking about. And the figures don't take into account the 574 Smith and Nephew redundancies announced on Wednesday."

ends

Note to Editors: Pendle Job Watch follows

For Immediate Release: 26 January 1993
14/93

MP TELLS RAIL CHIEFS: "PAY UP FOR "PUFFING BILLY" JOURNEY!"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is out to win compensation for a party of 16 students and staff from Mansfield High School in Brierfield whose train to London arrived one hour and thirty eight minutes late - wrecking a carefully prepared itinerary for a tour around Westminster.

Prentice commented: "The train due at 11.30am, finally limped into Euston at 1.08pm. Although a large part of the tour had to be abandoned the students saw Prime Ministers Question Time and caught a fleeting glimpse of a Standing Committee at work. They also popped into the Lords and climbed Big Ben. But instead of a properly paced educational trip the whole thing was conducted at the pace of an old Charlie Chaplin film."

"I have today tabled in the House of Commons a question to the Secretary of State for Transport asking him what compensation my young constituents can expect under the so called Passengers' Charter. I also want to know what is happening to the investment programme for the West Coast main line and what new rolling stock is being introduced to replace clapped out locomotives that seem to be breaking down all the time."

The MP has also written to British Rail demanding compensation for his constituents "miserable journey".

For Immediate Release: 27 January 1993
15/93

MP MEETS HIGH COMMISSIONER ON AFZAL KILLING

"Still no news" is the outcome of the long awaited, face to face meeting between Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and the Acting High Commissioner for Pakistan, Khalid Shafi, on the brutal murder of Nelson driving instructor Mohammed Afzal.

Prentice sought the meeting to discuss progress of the investigation into the murder of Afzal who was gunned down in Jaurah Village, Pakistan on 4 October last year. The MP was joined by Mohammed Afzal's widow, Elizabeth, and Zafar Iqbal, the brother of the murdered man and a key witness. Iqbal miraculously survived the attack which left him with multiple bullet wounds.

Prentice said: "Almost four months after the shooting the High Commissioner, unfortunately, had precisely nothing to report. He was unable to tell me what progress the investigation had reached, who was in charge, what interviews had been conducted and whether anyone had been charged."

"On the positive side, we have now made personal contact with the Pakistani authorities here and they have promised to chase things up. They now have chapter and verse of what happened, where, when and why from the key witness, Zafar Iqbal, and there is no reason now why the matter cannot be pursued energetically with the Provincial Government responsible for policing.

"I intend to apply steady, gentle but insistent pressure until I have a detailed report on the police investigation. I hope to hear something positive in the next few weeks" said the MP.

more follows

Afzal Killing

Note to Editors: On 14 October, Prentice passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister responsible at the Foreign Office. On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers Mohammed Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal has now returned to the UK and, although desperately ill, is now off the critical list. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

On 10 November Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps had been take to help the Pakistani authorities to apprehend the killers of Mohammed Afzal in Jaurah village, Pakistan on 4th October. The Minister (Mark Lennox Boyd MP) told the MP: "Mr Afzal was a dual British-Pakistani national, and the United Kingdom has no standing under international law to intervene in the investigation of his murder, which is being conducted by the Pakistani police. Our High Commission in Islamabad is, however, maintaining contact with the Pakistani authorities."

For Immediate Release: 28 January 1993
16/93

GOVERNMENT STICKS THE BOOT INTO PENDLE says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused Government Ministers of turning a deaf ear to the problems of Pendle and the North West. The MP's outburst

followed the publication today of the details of the local government finance settlement which determines the amount of Government grant Pendle Council and Lancashire County Council will get for the financial year beginning in April.

The Standard Spending Assessment for Pendle - the amount central government thinks the council should spend - was increased by an infinitesimal £1,000 from a proposed figure of £9.052m to £9.053m. The amount of Revenue Support Grant from the exchequer is to be trimmed from a proposed figure of £4.259m to £4.257m. The County Council's SSA is to be cut from a proposed £866.477m to £865.629m.

Prentice said: "This Government really knows how to stick the boot in. Pendle's SSA increase is a fraction of one per cent - well below inflation and ignoring all the new burdens and duties heaped on the council. It is just as bad for the County which has been hit over the head with a wooden mallet."

"There is also a big problem looming with very large percentage increases between the new Council Tax - to be introduced this April - and the Poll Tax. In some cases over 30%. Without changes to the Government's transitional relief scheme (designed to limit increases in the Council Tax) the percentage increases in some Pendle Council Tax Bills will be so high they will send people into orbit. The people responsible for introducing the Poll Tax are still doing their sums on the back of old envelopes" said the MP.

Note to Editors: The debate on the Revenue Support Grant will be held in the Commons next Wednesday, 3 February.

For Immediate Release: 4 February 1993 17/93

MP's "PONTIOUS PILATE" JIBE

President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, has told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, that he is powerless to prevent Smith and Nephew pulling out of denim manufacture. On 19 January, the company announced the loss of 574 jobs at its plants in Pendle.

Mr Heseltine said that while he regretted the closure it was the company's decision. He told the Pendle MP that his Department had received no specific representations about denim or denim cloth during its recent discussions with the UK textile industry. Talks had been held in the run up to the two year extension of the bilateral MFA agreements which governs trade with other textile producers. He claimed the European Commission stood ready to act on claims of dumping but his Department knew of no approach from any UK company over denim goods.

Prentice said: "This letter is vintage Heseltine. He is supposed to be in charge of Britain's trade with the rest of the world yet he is presiding over the destruction of swathes of manufacturing industry - much of it in my constituency and in the North West.

"What was the regional arm of the DTI doing to help and advise Smith and Nephew? Did it know of the company's difficulties? What representations is the Government making to the EC about the transfer of denim manufacturing

capacity to the countries of Eastern Europe? Why is it that, in the period January to November 1992, Germany could export denim worth £4.3m to the UK; Italy £2.6m; Belgium £1.5m and other EC countries £6.8m. We are awash with denim imports from the rest of the world yet what has the Government been doing about it?"

"I shall continue to press for a debate on the industry on the floor of the House. Heseltine may wash his hands of the textile industry but I will not" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 4 February1993
18/93

PRENTICE SLAMS GRANT "FIDDLES"

The way in which Central Government grant is distributed to local authorities has been described as a "giant fiddle" by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Earlier this week, he told the House of Commons that the needs of Pendle and Lancashire County Council had been ignored.

Prentice said: "I joined an all Party deputation from Pendle Borough Council in a meeting with Local Government Minister, John Redwood, but a fat lot of difference that made. The council put forward a cogent and closely argued case and the end result was a miserable increase of £1,000 in what the Government thought the council should be spending from April onwards."

ends

Note to editors: In the debate on the Local Government Finance Settlement on 3 February, Prentice said:

8.42 pm Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) :I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to follow the speech by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). I shall not take long, as I am conscious that many of my hon. Friends wish to speak in this debate.

The hon. Member for Ludlow spent a great deal of time regaling the House with his difflculties in understanding the documents before us. I hope that I shall be able to shed some light on them and to explain the motives and the politics behind the formula on page 28 that he misquoted.
The hon. Member for Ludlow spoke about fairness, as did the Secretary of State, who said in his opening speech: "You have got to be fair to local tax payers." That is from the right hon. and learned Member who was responsible for introducing the poll tax—the man responsible for introducing the council tax. He wanted to get rid of the rates because, as he told *The Financial Times:* "A property tax is not fair."

That was the justification for introducing the poll tax. The very same man is getting rid of the poll tax and introducing another council tax.
The hon. Member for Ludlow went on at great length about thrift, but it sticks in my throat to hear anyone from the Conservative Benches talking about thrift after the Government squandered £14 billion on the poll tax. How can they possibly talk about thrift with a straight face?

Fairness is not a characteristic of the new council tax. How can a tax be fair when single people get an automatic 25 per cent. discount on their council tax bills simply because they live alone? They could be millionaires or be living in band G houses, but they get a 25 per cent. discount, while a struggling family which is trying to get by just above income support level has to pay the full whack. That is not fair.

The politics behind the formula is that the Conservatives want to depress public spending. They are open about it. They want to cut public provision, as they do not believe in it—if it can be privatised, then privatise t.
The formula is another ideological attack on local government. Although we hear about efficiency and effectiveness all the time, it is not about efficiency. It is about transferring provision from the public to the private sector wherever possible. It is not merely happening to local government. Post offices and job centres are closing. Public provision is contracting everywhere, because that is the Government's ideological mission.

The tax is also a threat to democracy. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) mentioned the erosion of democracy and the fact that councillors now lack controls because of the functions that have been transferred to what has been dubbed the "new magistracy" —-to shadowy characters who have not been elected but now have control of vast amounts of public money.

The revenue support grant settlement will mean major job losses. In my neck of the woods, it is about as welcome as a dose of anthrax. Job losses have spiralled since the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister in November 1990. There were 1,708 unemployed people in Pendle then, but the figure has spiralled to more than 3,000, and that was before the 574 job losses announced last week at Smith and Nephew.

On standard spending assessments, I shall not go over the ground that has been adequately covered by my hon. Friends the members for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) and for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall), who is no longer in the Chamber. The SSAs were supposed to be an objective measurement of need. Because Government grant follows them, they are important. The present Secretary of State for the Environment told the Association of District Councils conference on 17 September 1987:
"Our plans for the new grant system" the SSA—
"will ensure stability, accountability and a great deal more simplicity."

He said the same about the poll tax, and he got that wrong. The new stable system that he was describing a few years ago is now under review by his Department and by the Audit Commission.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West delivered a powerful critique of the flaws of the SSA system, which does not simply reflect need—whether in Lancashire, West, Barnsley or anywhere in the north of England—but tips resources to the south and the south east. The formula makes no allowances for unemployment or structural change. In my area we have lost 20,000 jobs in the textile industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) mentioned the incredible changes in the mining industry in his area, which are also not reflected in the formula, yet it is supposed to be fair.

The SSA methodology is really suspect when it comes to members of our communities who come from the new Commonwealth and Pakistan. We were told that, wherever possible, information from the 1991 census is being used, but in the case of those members of our community they are using information from 1981. The information there is 12 or 13 years out of date.

What does this mean to an area like mine in north-east Lancashire? In Pendle, in 1981, 6 9 per cent. of the population came from the new Commonwealth and Pakistan. By 1991—and these figures are not incorporated in the formula—the proportion had gone up to 9 9 per cent. In other words, there was a difference of a full three percentage points, yet this is not built into the figures.

Earlier, there was a discussion about the census. The Secretary of State or one of his friends tried to argue about the accuracy of the census, but we all know from experience that there has been a haemorrhage of voters from the register because of the poll tax. I am not the only person who says so: the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys itself says the same. That office says that the 1991 census is 500,000 people light. I suspect that many of those people live in inner-city areas—areas that tend to be represented by Labour politicians.

The Secretary of State has said that the new grant system provides accountability. What a joke. I want to quote from my local paper, the excellent *Lancashire Evening Telegraph.* Many of my hon. Friends know the paper and no doubt agree with me about its excellence. This is what my local paper, on 13 January 1993, said about the accountability that the Secretary of State trumpets:

"This drastic surgery on our local services—police, schools and the rest—has really nothing to do with local government.
The cuts are taking place by government decree—one that insists that, in order to stay below capping levels, the county council has to chop £60 million from its budget.
The only real input our local representatives have in this process is to consider the list of horrible options put in front of them—such as fewer police and teachers."

That says it all. All this talk about democracy— handing power back to the people—is a complete distortion of the truth.

The Secretary of State talked also about simplicity. We all know—the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) will appreciate this, as he believes in simplicity—that, the more simple the system, the more likely it is to contain mistakes. We have got used to rough and ready, back-of-the-envelope stuff from the Government.

My local authority in Pendle had its SSA increased by a miserable £1,000 and that was after my councillor colleagues and I had gone to see the Minister to plead the case. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) spoke at great length and with great eloquence about Lancashire county council. That council's SSA has gone down from the £866-4 million of November to £865-6 million. As I said earlier, these resources are being tipped from the north to the south of England.

I want to move rapidly to the question of gearing, which was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping). A local authority is not a free agent in this respect. Indeed, 85 per cent. of local government spending is determined at the centre, and only 15 per cent. by the local authority itself. If a council wants to spend rather more than central Government think it should spend, it has to make colossal increases in the council tax. We have heard a great deal about capping, but that is another story. The gearing is designed to hold public spending down—that is the whole object of the exercise.

Connected with this matter is the whole question of valuations. The valuations have been absolutely botched. It costs about £176 to value a property in Pendle. In Lancashire as a whole, the figure is about £1-90. There has been no proper valuation at all. We are going to see an avalanche—I have heard a figure of 1-5 million—of appeals in April when people get their council tax bills.

For example, a pensioner came to see me who lives in a farm cottage one third of a mile from the nearest metalled road and one third of a mile from the nearest street light. His rubbish is not collected by the local council. Before the introduction of the poll tax, he paid about £114 in rates. The couple are just above income support level, and, as their property has been tipped into band C, they will now pay £577. The man told me that he did not have that sort of money. He did not understand what was happening. He though that the new council tax would be a fair replacement for the poll tax. But it is not fair. It is not fair to him, and it is unfair to many other people.

To iron out some of the unfairness, the Government introduced a transitional relief scheme. But we know that that scheme has been massively underfunded. Ministers wanted £1 billion from the Treasury, but they managed to squeeze out about £300 million. This has had a horrendous impact in areas, such as Pendle, that are traditionally low-rated.

When, about a month ago, my colleagues and I went to see the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, we made it absolutely clear to him that the problem was that, even with increases capped, there were some very big percentage rises. We quoted the example of a two-person household in band A — 67 per cent. of the people in my constituency live in houses in that band — with transitional relief. Even after the application of the transitional relief scheme, those people will pay 33 7 per cent. more in council tax than they did under the old system.

As I am conscious of the time, I wish to conclude with a word of warning to Conservative Members. It was the Pendle factor, among others, that sank the poll tax. Latterly, my predecessor, Mr. John Lee, was vocal in his opposition to the poll tax. In a low-rated, low-wage, poverty-stricken area, such as mine, the council tax too will have punitive effects.
There is nothing in this financial settlement—nothing in the transitional relief or in the council tax or in the SSAs —to give me, any of my council colleagues or the residents of Pendle any encouragement at all. It is a bad deal for north-east Lancashire and, more importantly, for local government generally.
Contact: Gordon Prentice MP 071 219 4011 (House of Commons)

For Immediate Release: 4 February 1993
19/93

PRENTICE WELCOMES M65-M6 LINK UP

The Government's decision to extend the M65 westwards from Blackburn to the M6 has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP told Transport Secretary, John MacGregor MP, that the news would be welcome in the North West. But he challenged MacGregor to come clean on the Government's long term plans - if any - for extending the M65 eastwards. At the moment it ends at Colne. Prentice told the Commons today that this uncertainty, over many years, had sterilized acres and acres of land in Pendle.

Speaking afterwards, Prentice said "MacGregor confirmed the Government was looking at the consultants report on another trans-Pennine crossing and it seems beyond doubt that the only options being considered are those set out in the report. The eastwards extension of the M65 does not feature. All that remains to be done now is for the Government to state simply, clearly and unequivocally that it has no plans now or in the long term to extend the motorway beyond Colne. The Government would do everyone a favour if it made its views plain."

ends

Note to editors: Prentice has written to the Secretary of State for Transport requesting an explicit statement on the Government's long term plans for the M65. He awaits a reply.

For Immediate Release: 4 February 1993
20/93

PENDLE MP BLASTS RAIL PRIVATISATION PLANS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hit out at Government plans to privatise British Rail. He claims that if the proposals go through, rail track in East Lancashire will be ripped up within a few years.

The MP told a meeting of railway workers at Westminster that the profitable bits of BR were to hived off to the private sector with BR left with the rest - uneconomic lines, clapped out rolling stock and infrastructure too expensive to maintain. Prentice said: "This really is the Poll Tax on wheels. The Tories are creating a gigantic new bureaucracy and privatising BR when they should be keeping it intact and modernising the service. The Government should be upgrading the West Coast line and investing in the railway. Instead they have cut Government subsidy* from £1,157m in 1985/6 to £641m in 1990/1."

"Seven parts of the national rail system are being surgically removed from the rest. Our lines in North East Lancashire will be left to rot and we will be told - as sure as night follows day - that they will have to close because they are uneconomic. Railway viaducts that need expensive maintenance - such as the one at Colne - provide a ready made excuse to shut lines down" said the MP.

Note to Editors: *This subsidy is known as the public service obligation grant. Parts of BR privatised since 1980 include BR Hovercraft (sold in 1981 to the

management); BT Hotels; Sealink (UK) Ltd; Doncaster Wagon Works; Travellers Fare Ltd; BREL (railway carriage manufacturer) and BR's last steam operated narrow gauge railway at the Vale of Rheidol.

The Government has given no commitment to preserve, long term, the current network or broadly similar amount of track. Neither is there a commitment to keep elderly and young persons' railcards.

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1993
21/93

JAILED PENDLE MAN SEES PROSPECT OF RELEASE AFTER 22 YEARS

Anthony Alexandrowicz, the Nelson man jailed 22 years ago for a crime he says he never committed, is to have his case reviewed by the Discretionary Lifer Panel of the Parole Board on 22/24 June.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who has been pressing the Home Secretary for two years to review the case is delighted that Alexandrowicz might soon be free but he warned against "excessive optimism".

The MP said: "I feel a tremendous sense of relief that things seem to be moving at long last. I had the jailed man's mother come to see me recently and wrote to the Home Secretary to ask for a meeting to discuss her son's case. My call for a meeting with Kenneth Clarke was turned down but in the same letter I was given the date for the Parole Board hearing. It is still over four months away - a hell of a long time - but it is the bat of an eyelid in a jail term 22 years long."

ends

Note to Editors: The MP has been working with the "Free Alex Now" campaign to press for Alexandrowicz's earl release. Since the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the Home Secretary no longer has responsibility for decisions to release discretionary life sentence prisoners - but he must still refer cases to the Parole Board for consideration. The Discretionary Lifers Panel has the authority to direct Alexandrowicz's release. Peter Lloyd MP, Minister of State at the Home Office has told the MP that Alexandrowicz will be able to see all the papers that are before the Panel, appear before it and be legally represented, call witnesses to support his case and, when the Panel has decided, know the reasons for its decision.

Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in prison for twenty two years for a crime which, he maintains, he did not commit. Alexandrowicz was born in Nelson in Lancashire. He had a difficult home life and he was taken into

more

follows

care at the age of 12 because of violence in the family. After he left Approved School he became a small time burglar. When he was 17, he allegedly broke into a house in Preston and stabbed the woman living there in the breast and stomach. She left the hospital the same day as she was admitted.

At the police station he made a confession - which he now says was made under duress. To this day, he maintains he is innocent. At the time, the psychiatric reports labelled him as someone prone to depression. However, he was not sent to a place where his condition could be treated but to an ordinary prison. He was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for wounding and aggravated burglary. He ended up in Parkhurst as a Category A prisoner. The experience brutalised him and he had a number of run ins with the prison authorities.

In 1988, three prison governors and two psychiatrists recommended to the Parole Board that he should be released. The Parole Board agreed and, in turn, reported to the Home Secretary who turned down the recommendation. The medical evidence confirmed that he was no danger to society.

The Granada TV programme advances one - very far fetched - theory in an attempt to explain the Home Office decision. Alexandrowicz is of Russian extraction. Although he knew his father had served with the Red Army he (Alexandrowicz) knew nothing of his grandparents. When Alexandrowicz was 16 he went to the Soviet Embassy to ask if they could help trace his long lost grandparents. When he was 21, Alexandrowicz applied for Soviet citizenship. The TV programme suggests that this found its way into Home Office files and prejudiced his chance of release from prison.

With all hope gone, he decided to escape from the open prison he was in. He contacted the TV people; gave them his story and then turned himself in. He is now back in prison - along with some 300 discretionary life prisoners who are now eligible for review under the new Criminal Justice Act 1991. He is one of over 200 that have been referred to the Parole Board for decision.

For Immediate Release: 9 February 1993
22/93

PENDLE MP SLATES "SEXIST" GARDEN PARTIES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging the Queen to cut out the "sexist and anachronistic" practice of inviting people to Royal Garden Parties - with their unmarried daughters, but only if they are aged between 18 and 25.

The MP has tabled an Early Day Motion in the Commons which asks Prime Minister John Major to have a word in the Sovereign's ear. Prentice said: "John Major had plenty to say in his Carlton House speech on 3 February about the dangers of clinging to "outmoded habits, rules and restrictions" and if anything falls into that category, this does."

Prentice continued: "The whole idea would be a complete joke were it not so serious. Why 18 - 25? Why unmarried? Why just daughters? Why treat Royal Garden Parties in the 1990s like a 1950s Debs Ball? Why on earth continue with a practice so totally out of tune with contemporary Britain?"

ends

Note to Editors: There are three Buckingham Palace Garden Parties this year on 13 July, 15 July and 20 July. The EDM reads: "That this House notes the Prime Minister's Carlton House speech on 3 February warning of the dangers of clinging to "outdated habits, rules and restrictions" and urges him to advise the Sovereign that invitations to Royal Garden Parties which are typically extended to "any unmarried daughters who are aged between 18 and 25 years of age" are sexist, anachronistic and are totally out of place in contemporary Britain and should be ended immediately."

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1993
23/93

GOVERNMENT "ALL AT SEA" OVER M65 says Prentice

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused the Government of being "all at sea" over whether or not to extend the M65 eastwards from Colne.

His attack follows the latest response from Transport Minister, Kenneth Carlisle, to an avalanche of Parliamentary questions on the subject tabled by the Pendle MP. "It is now as plain as a pikestaff that the Government hasn't a clue on how best to tackle this issue which is of such vital importance to my constituency" said Prentice.

"The Trans Pennine Study Strategy Report is a pathetically inadequate document. It is embarrassingly thin and doesn't begin to explore all the possible options. The consultants were asked to take into account planned network developments but were they told about the possibility of work starting on the M65 - M6 westwards link up? If not, why not? We know the Government has commissioned no further reports or studies on the possible extension of the M65, but why hasn't it? Kenneth Carlisle has told me he will "consider any suggestions about the extension of the M65 which may emerge from the current consultation on the Trans Pennine Study Strategy Report" but how can he form a view in the absence of any separate up to date studies commissioned by his department?"

Prentice concluded: "If the Government has no intention of extending the M65 eastwards - and that is what all the available evidence suggests - it should not keep my constituents twisting in the wind waiting for an answer."

more follows

Government "all at sea" says MP

Note to Editors: The terms of reference for the consultants responsible for the Trans Pennine Study Strategy Report were "to study traffic levels on the existing routes across the Pennines; to identify existing and future problems on the road network taking into account planned network developments and

forecast increases in traffic and the role of public transport; and to identify potential solutions and assess their environmental and economic impact."

For Immediate Release: 18 February 1993
24/93

PENDLE JOBLESS SURGES TOWARDS NEW PEAK says MP

Pendle's jobless total is up again - from 3,006 in December to 3,161 last month. It is now within striking distance of the three year high of 3,355 reached in August 92.

The Pendle figures mirror increases across the nation. For only the third time this century there are over 3 million people unemployed.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said the figures marked a new and shameful watershed for the Government. "I have been saying for a more than a year now that unemployment would breach the 3 million mark without fundamental changes in Government policy. Major just repeats his incantation about low inflation while ignoring what is happening to the real economy - the factories, offices and plants and the jobs they provide."

"The Prime Minister has laid a dead hand on Pendle. Since he entered No 10 in November 1990 unemployment here in Pendle has increased by a staggering 85%. After what he promised in the election he owes Pendle and the nation at large an apology."

For Immediate Release: 18 February 1993
25/93

MP STEPS INTO ELECTRICITY SHOWROOM CLOSURE ROW

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging Yorkshire Electricity to have a re-think about the proposed closure of their showroom in Barnoldswick. He is pressing electricity chiefs to keep the store open while he examines the arithmetic behind the decision.

In a bold move, the MP has involved the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont, in the actions of the privatised utility. The move was prompted by the Chancellor's description of the latest retail sales figures, released today, as "extremely encouraging".

Prentice told Lamont: "It seems clear from your comments today that these figures signal the start of the upturn. Given your confidence about the state of the economy, I wonder what advice you would give to Yorkshire Electricity who have decided to close their showroom in Barnoldswick a few days after your Budget on 20 March."

Prentice continued: "Pendle Council speaks for the entire community which is dismayed at the prospect of the closure of this magnet store in the town. If, as you say, the country is pulling out of recession, shouldn't Yorkshire Electricity stay their hand, despite what they say about difficult trading conditions, given the prospect of better times to come."

The MP said later that he would await the Chancellor's reply to his letter with interest.

For Immediate Release: 24 February 1993
26/93

PITS PROTEST GOES TO No 10

A petition from 4,000 Pendle people - outraged by the Government's plans to close 31 pits - was handed in to 10 Downing Street yesterday by local Labour Party President, Sally Lambert, her two children, Carla and Daniel, and local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The local Labour Party has links with Clipstone Colliery - one of the threatened pits - and the MP has been backing the case for Parkside, Lancashire's sole remaining colliery and one of the ten mines excluded from the moratorium on closures.

Sally Lambert said: "The pit closure programme doesn't make sense. We have the cheapest deep mined coal in the world and yet the Government wants to close down a vital national resource, throw thousands of miners out of work and destroy close knit pit communities. And what is the alternative? Filthy fuels such as Orimulsion which was planned to be fired at Padiham, the squandering of precious North Sea Gas reserves and the heavily subsidised nuclear industry."

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, added: "Today's leaked news (Wednesday) from John T Boyd - the US mining consultancy - that British Coal failed to follow its own guidelines in selecting two of the ten pits earmarked for immediate closure last October just highlights the slap happy way the whole sorry episode has been conducted. Heseltine's report, when it emerges from his ivory tower in the DTI, will be taken apart."

Carla and Daniel said after the Downing Street visit that jobs were scarce and it was stupid to close the pits.

or Immediate Release: 25 February 1993
27/93

GOVERNMENT CASH GRANT TO PENDLE "ONE BIG FIDDLE" says local MP

Government grant to Pendle Council for the year from April 93 is a fraction of the amount going to the Tory flagship councils of Westminster and Wandsworth in London, claims Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

Shock figures released by the MP today show the level of revenue support grant per head to Pendle comes in at £330.47p down 1.5% from the current year's grant of £325.65p.

Prentice commented: "That's bad enough but what really sends me into orbit are the comparable figures for Wandsworth and Westminster who - as sure as

night follows day - will be boasting very low Council Tax figures from April. Now we know how they do it.

"It is absolutely grotesque that the grant to Westminster per head will be £861.38p and to Wandsworth £677.77p yet here in Lancashire we must make do with less than half of that. The whole system is completely cockeyed and I shall be insisting on major changes to this lunatic system."

Note to editors: The Revenue Support Grant is central government's contribution towards the cost of providing local services. The other elements include the business rate (now centralised and nationalised by the Government) and the Poll Tax (from April the Council Tax). The current year's figures (1992/3) per head are: Pendle £325.65p; City of Westminster £958.85p; Wandsworth £714.59p. The Pendle figure for 1993/4 of £330.47p is made up of the Lancashire CC element of £280.85p and the Pendle Borough Council element £49.62p. Westminster gets £802.79p plus £36.74p for the police and £21.85p for the fire service. The comparable figures for Wandsworth are £619.18p; £36.74 and £21.85.

For Immediate Release: 25 February 1993
28/93

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR ACTION ON JOB LOSSES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has warned of an impending social catastrophe unless the Government takes urgent action to stem the flood of job losses. Speaking at Westminster today Prentice said that unemployment - and the fear of unemployment - were the spectres haunting every community in Britain.

"In Pendle there are 15 people claiming unemployment benefit for every vacancy but this is before the Smith and Nephew job losses feed through into the system. Elsewhere in the North West it is even worse with 27 people chasing every job and nationally the figure is 29. The latest redundancies announced at British Gas yesterday show there is no end in sight to the cascade of job losses."

"Here in the North West there are 334,700 unemployed people claiming benefit - an unemployment rate of 10.9%. There has been a staggering 113% increase since 1979 and a 38% increase since 1990. In this region alone the cost of unemployment is £3 billion and across the country as a whole, a mindblowing £26.9 billion. And who said unemployment was a price worth paying to get inflation down?

"My message to Norman Lamont on 16 March is forget the "Joy through Pain" policy of stoking up unemployment and give us what we want - a budget for jobs."

For Immediate Release: 25 February 1993
29/93

£900,000 STUDY "NOT WORTH A ROW OF BEANS" says Pendle MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused the Government of "breathtaking incompetence" in their handling of the controversy over the possible extension of the M65 eastwards from Colne.

The MP has fired a fusillade of Parliamentary questions to Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, and he claims the answers he has received paint a sorry picture of confusion at the heart of Government. He says the Government is unable or unwilling to come clean on its intentions.

Prentice said: "The possible extension of the M65 eastwards from Colne is no minor matter. We are not talking about the possible construction of a piddling little B road that is of no consequence to anybody but a road one that would dramatically transform the entire area.

"We know, that at the time they were commissioned, the consultants responsible for the Trans Pennine Study Strategy report were made aware of the fact that the Government was considering extending the M65 westwards from Blackburn to the M6. Yet there is no examination of the advantages and disadvantages of extending the M65 eastwards - and this in a report that cost a tidy £900,000. The report was inadequate. It arrived months late and really isn't worth a row of beans. It was commissioned in January 1990 and was expected to be completed in Spring 91. In fact it wasn't completed until Spring 92 and wasn't published until September last year."

The MP continued: "I am determined to get to the bottom of this whole affair. We are entitled to know how, and on what basis, the Government reaches important decisions on investing in the area's transport infrastructure."

more follows

£900,000 Study "not worth a row of beans" says MP

Note to Editors: Gordon Prentice MP said last week: "The Trans Pennine Study Strategy Report is a pathetically inadequate document. It is embarrassingly thin and doesn't begin to explore all the possible options. The consultants were asked to take into account planned network developments but were they told about the possibility of work starting on the M65 - M6 westwards link up? If not, why not? We know the Government has commissioned no further reports or studies on the possible extension of the M65, but why hasn't it? Kenneth Carlisle has told me he will "consider any suggestions about the extension of the M65 which may emerge from the current consultation on the Trans Pennine Study Strategy Report" but how can he form a view in the absence of any separate up to date studies commissioned by his department?"

For Immediate Release: 25 February 1993
30/93

HARTLEY HOSPITAL - MP DEMANDS DETAILS OF THE COST OF CLOSURE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing for a detailed report on the costs of the closure of Hartley Hospital in Colne, boarded up and empty since December 1989.

The MP told Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, that the hospital was "rotting away in front of our eyes". He claims she doesn't want to know. Prentice said: "Virginia Bottomley has passed the parcel to Sir Bruce Martin, chair of the North West Regional Health Authority but they are part of the problem.

"I want to know what plans the Health Authority has for this valuable site; how much they have spent since December 89 keeping it wind and weather tight; how much they have spent on security and how much longer they are prepared to see it stand empty. If they can't sell it what alternative uses have been considered?"

"This much loved hospital - given to the people of Colne by the Hartley jam family - is a testament to our times. Idle and unused for over three years it is a mirror of what is happening to our country and our people."

For Immediate Release: 25 February 1993
31/93

PRENTICE WINS DEBATE ON CRISIS IN LANCASHIRE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has secured an adjournment debate next Friday (5 March) on the crisis in Lancashire's textile industry.

The news follows the MP's earlier attempt on 20 January to get an emergency debate in the Chamber on the 574 redundancies at Smith+Nephew which had been announced the day before.

Prentice said: "Ever since I was elected as Pendle's MP last April textile jobs have been disappearing faster than the props in Paul Daniel's magic show. Smith and Nephew was the straw that broke the camel's back. North East Lancashire desperately needs a Government with a strategy for the industry.

"All we've had so far is the President of the Board of Trade telling the Tory Party Conference that he would intervene "before breakfast, before lunch and before dinner". Somewhere along the line he clearly got distracted. I shall be telling his Ministers next Friday that - despite their best endeavours - Lancashire still has a textile industry but it needs support and encouragement and a level playing field with the rest of the world.

ends

Note to Editors: Over the past decade, Lancashire's textile industry has shed approximately 20,000 jobs.

For Immediate Release: 2 March 1993
32/93

PRENTICE SLAMS PM OVER BBC CHIEF'S TAX AVOIDANCE WHEEZE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily with Prime Minister, John Major, in the Commons today over revelations that the Director General of the BBC

has been using an elaborate tax avoidance plan to escape payments of £30,000 a year to the Inland Revenue.

The outraged MP told a packed House of Commons that Director General, John Birt, should pay back to the Revenue all the tax avoided during his period as DG and, before that, his six years as Deputy Director General.

Prentice said: "It beggars belief that John Birt - as the BBC's top person - was not a staff member of the organisation that employed him. It's as if we suddenly discovered that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner was a freelance and not on the police staff payroll.

"The Prime Minister told me the tax affairs of the BBC's Director General were not for him but for the DG himself. That is a classic Major cop out. When it suits him, the PM is not slow to tell working people to limit their pay demands. But try getting him to condemn a flash harry like John Birt who has been avoiding tax to the tune of hundreds of thousands if pounds and he seizes up.

For Immediate Release: 2 March 1993
33/93

PRENTICE CONDEMNS HIKE IN PRESCRIPTION CHARGES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed today's 13% increase in prescription charges which pushes the price up 50p to £4.25. Speaking at Westminster today following news of the shock increase, the MP hit out at the Prime Minister for telling people to accept 1.5% pay increases while forcing them to swallow prescription charges eight times greater.

Prentice said: "It really is painful to see the Government try to justify this hike in charges after all they've said about the NHS being safe in their hands. It is chilling to think these very same hands are now in surgical gloves.

"There is a 5% increase in dental fees but people will have to pay 80% towards the cost of their treatment. This is a further step towards the wholesale privatisation of dentistry. In some parts of the country it is now virtually impossible to get an NHS dentist. We have a crisis in GP fundholding, no accountability with the new NHS Trusts, restrictions in the drugs that can be prescribed under the NHS and now this new twist in the spiralling cost of prescriptions. For people who believe in the NHS - and that's most of us - it is enough to make you sick."

ends

Note to editors: This is the 15th increase in prescription charges since 1979 when they stood at 20p

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1993
34/93

6p OVER THE LIMIT LOSES PENDLE FAMILY A SMALL FORTUNE

A Pendle family struggling hard to make ends meet has been told by a Government minister they will have to swallow the loss of free school meals worth over £30 for their three children because the family income is 6p too much.

The five strong Brownsett family live in Earby and rely on a number of state benefits. Mr Brownsett is in poor health and receives invalidity benefit and the total family income is 6p over the income support level - losing his children entitlement to free school meals. Mrs Brownsett is at home looking after her family.

The family called on local MP, Gordon Prentice, for help in turning round a situation where 6p could lose the family 500 times as much money in lost meals.

The MP said: "This is an Alice in Wonderland situation where the benefits system is so rigid and so inflexible that a few pennies over the limit causes a catastrophic cut in family income. People on Income Support receive maximum help with Housing Benefit and Poll Tax Benefit (100% of eligible rent and 80% of Poll Tax) and those above the basic Income Support level have their entitlement to Housing and Poll Tax Benefits reduced on a sliding scale. Why on earth can't the same principle apply to school meals - the cost of which can blow a hole in a family budget?"

"The reply I received from the Minister, Alastair Burt, offers no comfort to the Brownsetts whatsoever. And he is being hypocritical when he tells me *"there is no easy answer to the problem".* It was his Government that was responsible for the 1986 Social Security Act which took effect on the 11 April 1988 and removed the discretion which local authorities had to make free school meals available in this kind of circumstance. Now, a family has to be on Income Support for the children to qualify for free meals.

more follows

"Why can't the Government be honest for a change and instead of the parrot cry of "no easy answer" they could give back to local authorities the discretion they used to enjoy.

The MP fumed: "I shall be straining every sinew to get these ludicrous, topsy turvy rules changed."

ends

Note to Editors: The Brownsetts requested publicity to draw attention to their plight. The Minister told the Pendle MP: "There are inevitably a small number of families who, because their cash income is slightly above the level at which they qualify for Income Support, have to pay for the school meals they would otherwise receive free of charge. Such families do sometimes find that the income left to them is less than they would have received had they still been entitled to Income Support. However, that is inherent in any system which provides that entitlement to benefit carries with it automatic entitlement to benefit in kind. I understand Mr Brownsett's concern that he has been affected in this way, but there is no easy answer to the problem. It is

necessary to draw a line beyond which entitlement to free school meals must cease."

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1993
35/93

PATIENTS AT RISK FROM EXTENSION OF LIMITED LIST says Prentice

Local MP Gordon Prentice is backing Labour's campaign to stop the Government restricting more medicines from patients.

Last November, in an attempt to curb health costs, Virginia Bottomley, announced plans to extend the Selected List of medicines to a further 10 categories. This would restrict the number of medicines allowed on NHS prescriptions. The categories include contraceptives and drugs acting on the skin.

Opposition has been steadily mounting with Age Concern, women's organisations, the Pharmaceutical Industry and GPs all expressing concern at this measure which, it is feared, could adversely affect the quality of care for some patients.

Dawn Primarolo Labour's Shadow Health Minister said: "If some contraceptive pills are not available because this Government thinks they are too expensive, then it is women patients who will suffer - cheaper, higher dose brands can cause weight gain and depression amongst other side effects. Women may stop using the pill which would result in an increase in unwanted pregnancies and abortions. That will cost the NHS more than this petty measure saves."

Gordon Prentice MP added: "Labour wants an NHS where all patients get the best medical treatment available. Under the Conservatives we've started to see a two-tier NHS with GP Fundholder's patients getting fast-track treatment despite assurances to the contrary. Now I am most concerned that NHS patients will have to make do with cheaper, inappropriate medicines whilst the best is only available to those who can pay privately."

For Immediate Release: 4 March 1993
36/93

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR REVIEW OF DEFENCE SPENDING

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today challenged Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Michael Portillo to include the defence budget in the public expenditure reviews announced on 8 February. The Government plans to examine spending in four major departments of state - Social Security, Health, Education and the Home Office - and report before the end of this Parliament.

The Pendle MP told Portillo during Treasury Questions that the separate defence review *Options for Change* didn't go far enough. He said the Financial Times doubted if there was a case for *"economically battered Britain to outspend its richer European neighbours, devoting 4% of its economic output to defence compared with 3.4% for France and only 2.2% for Germany."*

Prentice said afterwards: "Defence spending cannot become a no-go area. It swallows up almost £24 billion - a massive slice of our national resources - and that kind of money must be spent with a purpose - to preserve our skills base as it does here in the North West and our manufacturing capacity. The millions spent on the Trident nuclear submarines is simply money down the drain.

"It is a curious irony. The poorer we get as a nation, the more we proportionately pay for our defence. And while we spent 5.2% of our GDP on health, the Germans spend 5.9% and the French 6.6%."

Prentice concluded: "The FT was absolutely spot on. We are still spending too much on defence - and on imported technology - while neglecting our basic manufacturing industries. We are starving them of the long term finance they need to develop leading edge products that people want to buy. The old lessons have not been learned."

For Immediate Release: 11 March 1993
37/93

MP CONDEMNS ROLLS ROYCE JOBS "CARNAGE"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has attacked the decision today by Rolls Royce to lay off 5,000 workers over the next two years including 170 at the Barnoldswick aero-engine plants in his constituency. The MP has written to Rolls Royce chairman, Sir Ralph Robbins, demanding an urgent meeting to discuss the company's future plans.

The MP also blasted John Major, following the Prime Minister's remarks during Commons question time today. Prentice said: "John Smith asked him to comment on today's shock news and was told that Rolls Royce had two main western competitors - Pratt and Whitney and Boeing. The Prime Minister was true to form - he was half right."

"It beggars belief that the Prime Minister got this wrong. Boeing makes planes not aero engines. That distinction goes to General Electric. What is absolutely unforgivable is this was no mere slip of the tongue. It was an assumption made by the man who told us a week ago today that he cares about manufacturing industry. And it was the product of sloppy research on a day when he must have known questions would be asked on Rolls Royce."

"All this stuff about his passion for manufacturing is just so much hype. He can't tell his Boeing from his elbow."

ends

Note to editors: The Pendle MP has today tabled an oral question to the Prime Minister asking him to name the two main competitors to Rolls Royce.

For Immediate Release: 11 March 1993
38/93

SMITH+NEPHEW REPORT RECORD PROFITS

Smith + Nephew, the medical products and textile company who announced in January they were pulling out of denim manufacture, reported record profits today. The decision to get out of denim and gauze manufacture came alongside news of 574 job losses in Pendle.

The company reported pre tax profits of £154.6m up from £132m last year. After deducting "extraordinary items" such as restructuring costs last year's profits came in at £70.3m.

The MP commented: "This year's profits were boosted by the sale of Nivea to a German company and that netted about £40m. But, even so, Smith and Nephew are not on their uppers. It is an absolute tragedy the company decided not to carry the denim side of the business even though it was making a loss. Many successful foreign firms use cross subsidy of their activities to shore up loss making elements of the business while they work on improving their profitability.

"The company's decision to pull out of denim manufacture leaves Britain with no denim industry whatsoever and the Exchequer with a colossal bill of over £5m in dole money, foregone taxes and benefits."

For Immediate Release: 11 March1993
39/93

AFZAL KILLING: MP STILL PRESSING FOR INFORMATION

Six months after the killing of Nelson driving instructor, Mohammed Afzal, in Juarah Village, Pakistan, the assassins are still walking free according to local MP Gordon Prentice.

Prentice has been pressing the Pakistani authorities for information ever since Afzal was gunned down on 4 October but has so far drawn a blank.

The MP said: "I have tabled a fistful of Parliamentary questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs but I've got more chance of winning the pools than I have of getting information out of our High Commission in Islamabad.

"I met the Acting High Commissioner for Pakistan in London in late January together with the murdered man's widow, Elizabeth, and his brother, Zafar Iqbal and while he was courteous and sympathetic to us, nothing of substance came out of it.

"I am again urging the Foreign Office to get their act together and put real pressure on the Pakistani authorities in Islamabad. They are both worse than useless.

ends

Note to Editors: On 14 October, Prentice passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister responsible at the Foreign Office. On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers Mohammed Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in

Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal has now returned to the UK and, although desperately ill, is now off the critical list. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

On 10 November Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps had been take to help the Pakistani authorities to apprehend the killers of Mohammed Afzal in Jaurah village, Pakistan on 4th October. The Minister (Mark Lennox Boyd MP) told the MP: "Mr Afzal was a dual British-Pakistani national, and the United Kingdom has no standing under international law to intervene in the investigation of his murder, which is being conducted by the Pakistani police. Our High Commission in Islamabad is, however, maintaining contact with the Pakistani authorities."

For Immediate Release: 11 March 1993
40/93

PRENTICE TELLS MINISTER: "KEEP ROSES RAIL LINK!"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has told Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, to intervene and force British Rail to keep the Rose Grove stop on the Roses Rail link service.

Under British Rail's proposals only one train each way daily on the Roses Link Rail service will stop at Rose Grove and this will the end of connecting services to/from Brierfield, Nelson and Colne to Leeds and beyond.

Prentice said: "I am backing the RMT's campaign to improve our local train services. What on earth is British Rail up to? Presumably they want to encourage people to use their trains yet they are determined to make it as difficult as possible for people to do so."

For Immediate Release: 15 March 1993
41/93

MP FURIOUS AT HIKE IN TOP SALARIES AT ROLLS ROYCE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted top management at Rolls Royce - whose Barnoldswick plant is in his constituency - for awarding themselves "stratospheric" pay increases while planning to lay off 5,000 workers from the recession hit company.

The MP said: "This weekend's revelations that Rolls Royce Chief Executive, Terence Harrison, received an increase of 35% taking his salary to £230,000 takes your breath away. I have already written to the chairman, Sir Ralph Robins, to seek a meeting to discuss the company's plans - but after this bombshell I want his salary to be on the agenda also. His pay zoomed 24% to £285,000."

The MP added: "This news fits in to the time honoured pattern. In September - when the Government pulled out of the ERM and devalued our currency - people were urged to keep their pay demands down to "maintain the competitive gains of devaluation". Then Howard Davies, the Director General of the CBI, stepped forward and told us in November that the competitive advantage handed to UK exporting companies by the devaluation of sterling would be squandered unless unit labour costs were reduced. Then the Government introduced its pay policy for the public sector. Try as I might, I have been unable to get the Government to condemn hikes in boardroom pay with the same fervour they reserve for the shopfloor. So what's new?"

Note to Editors: On 11 January, the Pendle MP asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer of he would bring forward proposals for higher rate tax bands to cover bonus payments of £6m a year. The Government refused to do so. The MP's question was prompted by the news that Peter Wood, Chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland's Direct Insurance subsidiary, had received a £6m bonus payment in addition to his basic salary of £285,000.

For Immediate Release: 15 March 1993
42/93

PRENTICE BACKS FIREFIGHTERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the nation's firefighters in their campaign to keep the fire service's national pay formula which has ensured good industrial relations since 1978.

The formula guarantees firefighters wages are in line with the upper quartile of manual workers' pay and has operated since the nine week long firefighters strike of 1978/9.

Speaking last weekend at Eastbourne at the London Regional Conference of the Fire Brigades Union, the MP said: "The Government has torn up a freely negotiated agreement with the firefighters that has lasted for 14 years. The Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, has told the FBU that firefighters can expect a pay increase of between 0% and 1.5% when their pay is settled in November 1993 and there will be no catch up the following year. It is a recipe for strife and bitterness."

The MP continued: "Working people are being told to pay the price for the Government's cack-handed mismanagement of the economy. Camilla Parker-Bowles has done more to ensure the long term survival of the monarchy than the Chancellor has ever done to get our economy back on the rails.

As for the hush puppied Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, he likes nothing better than sticking the boot in. Engineering a confrontation with the firefighters would make his day."

For Immediate Release: 18 March 1993
43/93

PHOTOCALL: The Budget

GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL SPEAK ON THE BUDGET
TO THE PENDLE ENTERPRISE TRUST AT THE FENCE GATE INN, PENDLE ON FRIDAY, 19 MARCH AT 12 NOON

For Immediate Release: 18 March 1993
44/93

PRENTICE SLAMS MISERY BUDGET

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted the Budget proposals announced on Tuesday. The MP claims they will bring misery to millions of people throughout the country.

"This is a shameful Budget but it reveals the Government's true colours. They should be red faced given the scale of the deception practised on the British people on 9 April last year.

"Four important promises made by the Tories during the General Election were broken by the Chancellor. They promised lower taxes - and taxes have been hiked spectacularly over the next three years. They promised mortgage tax relied would be maintained but it is being cut back.

"They said national insurance contributions would not be raised - and they have been. They solemnly swore that VAT would not be extended and that promise has gone out of the window. To load VAT on fuel is nothing less than criminal.

"Each of these election promises has been shown to be a lie. It is no wonder the trust people have in this Government has hit rock bottom. People don't like being deceived and while the Tories think they can get away with murder now, their day of reckoning will come."

For Immediate Release: 18 March 1993
45/93

PENDLE JOBLESS STILL OVER 3,000

Pendle's jobless total dipped slightly in February to 3,031 - down from a high of 3,161 the month before. The unemployment rate of 7.9% is below the regional and national rates.

Vacancies at the Job Centre in Colne are up from 49 to 91 and at Nelson they are down ten from 160 to 150.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Any drop in unemployment deserves a loud cheer but what we are seeing at the moment is the lull before the storm. The figures take no account of the 46 job losses at Progress Engineering which announced last week it was closing. They take no account of this week's body blow - the closure of Wadkin, the woodworking machine firm based in Trawden, where 62 people are being laid off. And of course we are still

waiting for the Smith and Nephew and Rolls Royce job losses to show up in the figures."

"There are 13 people in Pendle chasing every vacancy" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 23 March 1993
48/93

MP SLATES "GOVERNMENT OF CHEATS"

Prime Minister John Major heads a Government of cheats who lied their way back to power at last April's General Election according to outspoken local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice made his blistering attack yesterday in the final day of the Budget debate. He told the House of Commons the Tory manifesto represented a contract between the Government and the people and that its central pledges had been cast aside after less than a year.

"The whole political process has been corrupted by this Government who told the British people that the Conservatives were *"the only Party that understands the need for low taxation".* That rings hollow now. I doubt if the Prime Minister could talk about pledges - manifesto or otherwise - without being blown away in a gale of laughter. His pledges are totally devalued - just like our currency."

"The £17.5 billion tax rise announced in the Budget is the biggest in British history. Allowances have been frozen, mortgage tax relief has been cut and value added tax loaded on to domestic fuel. Yet at the end of our debates on the Budget there are still no cast iron guarantees that the poorest in society will be fully compensated."

Note to Editors: In the North West, 1,130,000 households will lose out because MIRAS is to be restricted to the 20% rate and some 2,734,000 people will pay higher tax bills because allowances and thresholds have been frozen. The 1% increase in National Insurance Contributions will affect 18 million people nationwide and 2,405,000 in the North West. A 1p increase in National Insurance Contributions is more regressive than a 1p rise in Income Tax because of the lower levels at which people start paying contributions. About 500,000 people nationwide on wages so low they don't pay income tax will be caught by the increase in NICs.

For Immediate Release: 22 March1993
49/93

MP TELLS LOCAL BUSINESSES: "IT'S NO BUDGET FOR JOBS"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told the Pendle Business Club's Budget post mortem last week that the Budget wasn't what the country needed to pull out of recession.

Speaking to local business people at the Fence Gate Inn, the MP confessed that he was deeply anxious about the state of the British economy. "I am not

saying this as someone with the vision of a new Jerusalem before my eyes as I speak. I say it simply as someone whose eyes are open and who sees all around the destruction of so much of our manufacturing base."

"The problems facing the British economy are not cyclical. We are not going to bounce out of recession and pick up where we left off. The problems are deep seated and structural - and they are plainly not being addressed."

The MP said afterwards: "To suggest this Budget is a Budget for jobs is a sick joke".

For Immediate Release: 23 March 1993
50/93

POLICE SHAKE UP GIVES CLARKE TOO MUCH POWER says Pendle MP

The shake up of police forces in England and Wales - announced in the Commons today by Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke - could lead to the creation of a national police force controlled and directed by Ministers in London according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster today, Prentice claimed the Home Secretary's rhetoric about devolving power to local level masked a further centralisation of power in his own hands.

"We are told the new police authorities would be more powerful and businesslike and that central controls on manpower and capital spending would disappear. This is a complete fairytale. Their precepting power would be subject to the same sort of control which applies to councils and the money they get from central government will be strictly cash limited. So they will have freedom to spend as much money as Kenneth Clarke thinks they should spend - and not a penny more."

"The Home Secretary will have the right to pack police authorities with his own nominees and he reserves the exclusive right to pick the chairperson. Does anyone really believe he'll choose anyone he considers to be a difficult customer. No chance!"

"If local democracy means anything it is for the local police authority to decide for itself who should be the chairperson. It is like suggesting the Environment Secretary should be responsible for choosing the leader of every local authority in England. The whole idea is preposterous."

For Immediate Release: 24 March 1993
51/93

LOCAL RAILWAYS ARE "COMING APART AT THE SEAMS" says MP

British Rail services in North East Lancashire are coming apart at the seams according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. A fortnight ago, the MP - who is backing the RMT transport union's campaign for better rail services - challenged the Secretary of State for Transport to step in and tell British Rail to safeguard the stop at

Rose Grove where timetabling changes threaten the connection from Colne to Leeds and beyond.

"Never has the buck been passed so quickly. I could hear the rush of air as the Government batted my question back to British Rail. The Minister told me *"the timetabling of services, including the maintenance of connections, is entirely a matter for the local management of British Rail".*

"How on earth does this square with what Sir Bob Reid, the Chairman of British Rail, told me a few days ago. The standard of service in East Lancashire is directly linked to the level of PSO (Public Sector Obligation) grant from central government which, says Sir Bob, has been "substantially reduced".

"He told me the track on the section of line between Rose Grove and Colne is *"both difficult and expensive to maintain*" and the position could deteriorate further. It is as plain as a pikestaff that the Government is engineering a crisis in British Rail where the less profitable routes will be closed down - and the money spinners sold off to the highest bidder. What a way to run a railway!"

ends

Note to Editors: In his letter dated 17 March, Sir Bob Reid said: "The section of track between Rose Grove and Colne is both difficult and expensive to maintain. The position is exacerbated by the use of Class 142 "Pacer" units on the East Lancashire Line. These trains are formed of two axle vehicles and, although economical to operate, their ride characteristics and weight distribution are such that they take their toll of jointed track. (more follows)

Rail Crisis in East Lancs

"Continuing pressure on Regional Railways finances is such that my local people are obliged to prioritise maintenance expenditure in favour of those routes which generate the most business. The unavoidable corollary for Colne, and a number of other routes. is that track condition deteriorates. A potential reduction is speed inevitably follows. hence the present 20mph restriction which must be regarded as permanent until such time as more funding becomes available...

For Immediate Release: 24 March 1993
52/93

COUNCIL TAX UNFAIR AND UNJUST says Prentice

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has fired another broadside against the Council Tax. He claims the tax is designed to be unfair and that thousands of people in Pendle will lose out.

Speaking at Westminster - as Government Ministers were again trying to justify the tax - the MP said:

"There are so many fiddles with this tax you could start an orchestra. No matter how big the property - or how large the incomes of the people living there - the tax at the top rate Band H will *never be more than three times* the tax paid at the bottom rate Band A. It follows that in places like Pendle where two thirds of all properties are in Band A and 77% are in Bands A and B, people living in houses in the lower bands will pay proportionately more in terms of the total tax take.

"Here in Pendle there are only 67 properties in the top Band H (valued at £320,000 and above) which represent 0.2% of the total number. In Tory controlled City of Westminster, by contrast, there are 13,829 Band H properties representing a colossal 13% of the total. In Tory Wandsworth there are 1,668 top band houses (1.4%) and next door in Ribble Valley 263 (1.3%).

"In Pendle people living in lower band properties are shouldering a greater share of the overall tax burden than they should. The Tories designed the tax to work this way while telling people grants from central government would iron out any unfairnesses. We now know that Pendle gets £330.47p per head compared with Tory Westminster's £861.38p and Wandsworth's £677.77p. The Tories are expecting us to believe that Westminster and Wandsworth have higher needs than my own constituency.

"To hear the word "fairness" emerge from the lips of a Tory Minister sends me into a tail-spin" confessed the MP. *More follows*

more follows

Council Tax

Pendle Council Tax

Band	% of properties	Council Tax
Band A	65.6%	£435.03
Band B	11.1%	£507.54
Band C	10.0%	£580.04
Band D	5.7%	£652.55
Band E	3.6%	£797.56
Band F	2.2%	£942.57
Band G	1.6%	£1,087.58
Band H	0.2%	£1,305.10

For Immediate Release: 24 March 1993
53/93

PRENTICE BACKS CAMPAIGN FOR AFFORDABLE RENTS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the campaign for affordable rents which was launched today at Westminster by the National Federation of Housing Associations (NFHA). The Government is planning to cut the Housing

Association Grant from 67% in 1993/4 to 60% in 1994/5 and down to 55% by 1995/6.

"I know Housing Associations across the country - including those such as Bradford and Northern in Pendle - are worried sick about the implications for rents. The projected rent levels - if these crazy Government proposals go through - are horrifying. The NFHA figures show that, in Lancashire, working households becoming association tenants would face an average rent of £75.86p in 1996 compared with £43.53p in 1992. On average, this group would spend 40.9% of their income in rent in 1996 as compared with 30.6% in 1992. And, most astonishing of all, a massive 81% of new working tenants would be spendiong more than a third of their income on rent in 1996 compared with 34% last year."

ends

Note to Editors: The figures were based on forecasts on movements of interest rates, building costs and inflation commissioned from City analysts, UBS Phillips and Drew. The NFHA believes the Government's proposals would result in average rents on new homes 75% higher in 1996 than in 1992. 91% of all new housing association tenants moving into new homes in 1996 would be on housing benefit if average grant rates go down to 55% in 95/6.

For Immediate Release: 25 March 1993
54/93

ROLLS ROYCE SHOW DOWN LOOMS

The row between Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and Rolls Royce directors over the decision a fortnight ago to lay off 5,000 workers is set to boil over next Tuesday (30 March) when the two sides meet at the company's Buckingham Gate headquarters in London.

The showdown will involve MPs with Rolls Royce plants in their constituencies and the company's top management and will focus on the lay-offs and the company's future plans.

The Pendle MP said: "I think the way in which highly skilled and loyal employees have been treated has been absolutely deplorable. And the salary increases for the Chief Executive and Chairman - which became public knowledge shortly afterwards - were simply grotesque."

"I need to know why the company went ahead with the sackings when we are told the country is pulling out of recession. I want to know what alternatives were considered and what involvement there was with the Government and the DTI. I want Rolls Royce to lay their cards on the table so we can talk business."

For Immediate Release: 25 March 1993
55/93

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR GREATER PUBLIC ACCESS TO LAND

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is spearheading a campaign to get greater public access over land where the owners have claimed full exemption from inheritance tax. The MP says wealthy landowners are claiming the tax break but are less enthusiastic about telling the public of their rights of access.

Prentice said: "It has always bothered me that landowners - often absentee landowners - could buy up tracts of land and then tell the public to shove off. Much of the beautiful, scenic wilderness land in the west coast of Scotland is now out of bounds to ramblers and others who enjoy the countryside. But there are swathes of land all over Britain which are no go areas."

The MP continued: "I want landowners who claim full exemption from inheritance tax to show the full extent of public access in a register kept for that purpose by the local authority. Landowners shouldn't be allowed to whisper about access to their land. I want them to shout it loud and clear so we all can hear."

Note to Editors: Landowners can claim full exemption from Inheritance Tax by virtue of S31 of the 1984 Inheritance Taxes Act. Last year's Budget stipulated that (for other taxpayers) Inheritance Tax would only apply to inheritances over £150,000.

On 19 March 1993, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury told the Pendle MP: "The owner of land that has been conditionally exempted from inheritance tax is already required to publicise the agreed public access arrangements. *The extent of the publicity depends on the facts of each case*. The owner will *generally* be required to take specific steps to publicise public access, for example by advertising the access arrangements in a local tourist office or town hall. The appropriate heritage advisory agency, for example the Countryside Commission for scenic land in England, is able to supply information about public access to heritage land including conditionally exempt land, although land will not be identified as conditionally exempt.

For Immediate Release: 31 March 1993
56/93

ELECTRICITY SHOP CLOSURE FAILS TO SPARK GOVERNMENT REACTION

The closure this month of Yorkshire Electricity's shop in Barnoldswick has failed to spark any interest whatsoever from the Chancellor of the Exchequer who heralded the February retail sales figures as the start of the upturn.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told the Chancellor on 18 February that the entire community in Barnoldswick was dismayed at the prospect of losing "a magnet store in the town". He wanted to know what advice the Chancellor would give to the company in view of the fact he had detected "extremely encouraging" signs of recovery.

"Norman Lamont passed the parcel to his side-kick the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Anthony Nelson MP, who tells me it is not a matter for the Government but for the commercial judgement of the company. This shoe shuffling simply demonstrates the complete lack of confidence Ministers have in their own predictions of economic recovery."

"The only thing this Government can predict with absolute confidence is that no Minister will ever resign - no matter which promise is broken, which pledge is cast aside or how great the betrayal of the British people."

Note to Editors: In his letter to the MP of 25 March, Anthony Nelson wrote: *"The recent trend in retail sales in the country as a whole has, as the Chancellor has said, been encouraging. The volume of retail sales has never been higher than it was in the three months to January. I imagine that Yorkshire Electricity are likely to take recent trends in retail sales into account in reaching their decision."*

For Immediate Release: 31 March 1993 57/93

PRENTICE LASHES BAXTER'S DECISION TO PULL OUT OF PENDLE

Last Friday's decision by Baxter Healthcare to close down their Nelson plant and transfer production to Malta has been condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The UK manager of the medical products company, a Mr Feakes, broke the news to the MP after inviting him to the plant. Prentice said: "Although I knew a number of jobs were to be transferred to Malta, the news of a total shut-down came as a complete bombshell. The skilled and loyal workers of Baxter's Healthcare have been handed a bouquet of barbed wire by this multinational company who are clearly footloose and fancy free."

The MP is determined to unearth the facts which prompted the decision to transfer production to Malta and to the company's main UK plant at Thetford in Norfolk. "It is simply not good enough for Baxter's to wash its hands of Pendle in this way. I am in contact with the Department of Trade and Industry about the details of the trade relationship between Malta - which is outside the European Community - and the EC."

"We are now in this bizarre situation where top quality medical products such as intravenous drips will be made in Malta and imported back into the UK to be used in our own hospitals. I have written to the Secretary of State for Health to find out how much money the NHS spent on Baxter products last year and I have also asked for this information from Burnley NHS Trust. As far as I am concerned, Baxter's can sell their products wherever they like - so long as it isn't to our NHS."

Note to Editors: Baxter Healthcare Ltd is part of the American multi-national group, Baxter International Inc. The latest accounts were filed on 30 November 1991 and showed the company had sales of £137,927,000. The company had a trading profit of £8,510,000 although after deductions for depreciation, interest paid on the company's borrowings (£3,362,000) and the salaries paid to the four directors (£511,000) it turned in a pre tax profit of £775,000.

For Immediate Release: 31 March 1993
58/93

ROLLS ROYCE TELLS MPs "THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE"

The long awaited clash last night between Rolls Royce directors and Labour MPs over the company's plans to lay off 5,000 employees - including 170 at the Barnoldswick plants - produced a stand off with neither side conceding ground according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice who was part of the nine strong deputation to the company's London HQ.

"As soon as the preliminaries were over, I raised the issue of the grotesque salary increases of 35% and 24% awarded to the Chief Executive Terence Harrison and the Chairman, Sir Ralph Robins, at a time when the company was sacking thousands of people. Harrison is now on £230,000 and Sir Ralph £285,000. I couldn't belive my ears when I was told that board room salaries had to be "internationally competitive". This clearly does not apply to everyone else in the company whose salaries are determined by what is happening in the domestic economy where increases of between 0% and 1.5% are the order of the day.

"Almost as bad are the plans to lay off apprentices finishing their time. They are the people developing the skills to make the aero-engines in the years ahead. What a crazy world."

"It is no secret that Rolls Royce is re-focussing its business and is developing the industrial power systems part of the company. They told us the business had to be restructured to fit current and projected market conditions. The aero-engine side had to cope with the contraction in the military order book and the market in civil aerospace was sluggish. We took the point about the difficult trading conditions but this state of affairs clearly isn't going to last forever. To sell the seedcorn now is simply crazy."

more follows

The MP continued: "We wanted to hear the company commit itself unequivocally to the UK. There are deep concerns about some of the joint ventures - for example with BMW on the successor to the Tay engine - which many fear will lead to manufacturing being transferred abroad.

"It is as plain as a pikestaff that the Government could do an awful lot more to support this key industry. Their "launch aid" to companies in the aerospace field petered out in 1986 or thereabouts. And the Government is not doing nearly enough to help develop leading edge technologies in, for example, materials. Ceramics and plastics could provide the next big breakthrough in engine technology and Britain has got to be there, out in front."

"All in all, I have to say it was an extremely disappointing meeting."

For Immediate Release: 31 March 1993
59/93

COMMUNITY CARE "SABOTAGED" BY GOVERNMENT says Pendle MP

One of the main objectives of the new community care system to be introduced tomorrow, 1 April, is being completely undermined by the Government according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

"By gearing the distribution of the Special Transitional Grant to the previous geographical pattern of DSS funding to care and nursing homes, the Conservatives have written off the original key objective of promoting alternatives to permanent institutional care. The money is being passed to areas where disabled and older people have previously been *sent* and not invested in developing these domiciliary alternatives in their home areas" said Prentice.

"The perverse incentive to enter residential or nursing care - one of the main problems with the previous funding system - will continue as a direct result of the Government's insistence that 85% of the Special Transitional Grant has to be spent on what they term the "independent" sector. In many areas, there is no "independent" sector domiciliary care and local authorities will be forced into the ludicrous position of placing people in care or nursing homes even when they don't need such provision. It is an absurd situation - and it is all of the Government's own making" said the MP.

Note to Editors: The Labour Party has just published a new policy document *New Directions In Community Care.* It states: "For many users and carers April's changes in community care will prove a false dawn. Hopes of an improved deal for users and carers and, in particular, the development of alternatives to permanent institutional care for older people and those with disabilities, have been dashed by the manner in which the Conservatives have implemented the provisions of the 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act.

It has become only too obvious to all concerned with community care that the Government's main motivation in bringing the April changes, has been to save money. It has been about the Exchequer's desire to move away from an open-ended commitment to income support payments to residents in private and voluntary care and nursing homes. While the new arrangements have been cloaked in the respectability of assessment and choice, the real attraction for the Government has been the opportunity to cut spending on a budget which has risen from £lO million in 1979 to over £2.5 billion in 1992/93.

The document reflects the view of many concerned with caring that even after the April changes, our social services system will not genuinely enable users and carers to exercise a real choice from a wide range of different provisions. It reflects a belief that even after the introduction of assessment procedures and care management, many individuals will still end up in permanent institutional care placements not on the basis of a positive choice but for the simple lack of properly thought out community alternatives. It concerns itself with the way users and carers are all too often expected to fit into the existing range of services, rather than the other way round.

Conservative Policy and the 1993 changes. The Government was forced into the community care changes contained in the 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act by the consequences of leaving provision to

the market during much of the 1980s. After eligibility for supplementary benefit (income support) top-ups towards the costs of private or voluntary residential or nursing care was extended in 1981, there was a huge increase in the number of private and residential nursing home places - considerably greater than would have been needed to take account of demographic trends.

As local authority community care provision increasingly bore the brunt of Government cuts, it became easier to qualify for public funding towards the cost of permanent care than to obtain often cheaper assistance for independent or semi-independent living. In the Government's language, community care became synonymous with private institutional provision. When they boasted of record levels of community care expenditure, they were referring to the ever escalating cost of supplementary benefit/income support payments to people in permanent residential or nursing care.

Eventually, budgetary considerations and the obvious fact that significant numbers were being placed at huge public cost in often unnecessary institutional care, led to the changes proposed in the *Griffith's Report*, the White Paper *Caring for People* and the subsequent legislative changes in the 1990 Act.

While there was a broad political consensus around Griffith's strategy for unravelling the mess the Govemment had got itself into during the 1980s. There has certainly been no agreement over the way in which they have belatedly implemented the 1990 Act's community care provisions.

According to the local authority associations, the changes have been underfunded to the tune of £135 million in 1993/94 and the distribution of the special transitional grant to local authorities - based on 50% current SSA and 50% the geographical pattern of DSS funding to care and nursing homes - bears absolutely no relationship to known needs in their individual areas. The funding bias towards areas where people have been *sent* rather than from where they *originated* will positively obstruct the development of a range of care services in many areas.

On top of this, the requirement to spend the bulk of the special transitional grant on what the Government calls the "independent" sector is the clearest possible proof that the Government is resigned to continuing to see users placed unnecessarily in institutional care when a preferred choice of often cheaper community alternatives could and should be made available.

For Immediate Release: 1 April 1993
60/93

MP REBUKES ROLLS ROYCE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has fired an angry shot across the bows of Rolls Royce chiefs following yesterday's disclosures by company chairman, Sir Ralph Robins, to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry that Rolls Royce is repaying about £30m a year to the Treasury for launch aid for civil aircraft programmes given since 1972. Sir Ralph also told MPs the company expected to repay nearly £500m to Government between now and 2001.

The MP says these key facts on the lack of Government support were not reported to a meeting - held at the company's London HQ less than 24 hours beforehand - which had been called to brief MPs with direct constituency interests on the difficulties facing the company.

In a letter sent today to Ken Binning, the company's Director of Government Relations, the Pendle MP said he was unaware the company had received just £15m per year for research from the DTI compared with $700m (£492m) given to US aero engine manufacturers by the US Government.

The MP said: "I am simply not interested in getting PR presentations from companies - whether they are Rolls Royce or not. If companies are not getting the help, support and advice they need from a Government that is supposed to believe in manufacturing, they should stand up and say so. I am fed up listening to companies afraid to say boo to a goose."

"This Government has been as helpful to manufacturing industry as the Black Death. Its about time the victims spoke up."

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1993
61/93

PENDLE MP BACKS PENSION AT 60

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to equalise the state retirement age at 60 in the face of mounting speculation that the Government aims to go for a common pension age at 65.

The MP asked Social Security Minister, Peter Lilley, to quash rumours that the retirement age for women was to be raised but received a non committal reply.

Prentice said: "The Government's refusal to come clean about its intentions is pretty much par for the course. There was nothing in the Tory manifesto about increasing the state retirement age for women to 65 - but that doesn't mean to say they won't try to get it through. The pit closure programme didn't appear in the manifesto either."

"It looks as if the Prime Minister has temporarily shelved the legislation to up the retirement age for women for fear of the furore it would provoke. Over the next few months we will see a discreet campaign by the Government aimed at softening up public opinion."

Note to Editors: Early last year, the Government issued a consultation document *Options for Equality in the State Pension* giving interested parties six months to respond. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the DSS, Ann Widdecombe MP has told the Pendle MP the Government is still analysing the results of the consultation exercise.

Only 15% of women currently qualify for the full state pension. Two thirds of women have no occupational pension. For many of them the state pension is their only retirement income. 43% of women pensioners today have a gross weekly income of less than £50. If the Government adopts the advice of its own Social Security Advisory Committee all women aged 40 and under will have to work to 65.

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1993
62/93

GONGS FOR THE ASKING

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging people who feel they could do with an Honour to pick up their pens and nominate themselves.
His move follows a request from a constituent who wanted to know the new nomination procedure.

The MP was told by the Prime Minister that since the review of the Honours system announced on 8 March - ostensibly designed to open up the procedure - over 1,600 names had been forwarded to the Honours Nomination Unit at Number 10, including a dozen self nominations.

Prentice commented: "Many people with outstanding records of community service never get within sniffing distance of an honour yet gongs are dished out to people according to an invisible social hierarchy that has more in common with Anthony Trollope than with late 20th century Britain. When are we going to see a shop assistant or a police officer on the beat awarded a knighthood?"

"We need more transparency in the system so we all know the basis on which honours are awarded. Nomination forms should be freely available in public libraries setting out the criteria showing how selections are made. I want to see Downing Street justifying some of the honours it dishes out."

Note to Editors: The Honours Unit in Number 10 employed six staff in 1993 - no change on last year's figure.

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1993
63/93

MP ACCUSES TRANSPORT MINISTER OF "DOUBLE SPEAK" ON RAIL CUTS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, claims Government Ministers are incapable of giving a simple answer to a straight question.

The exasperated MP tabled a series of Parliamentary questions following revelations last month from the Chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid, who told the MP that 20 mph speed restrictions over part of the track between Rose Grove and Colne *"should be regarded as permanent until such time as more funding becomes available".*

"Given this frank and honest statement from the Chairman of British Rail, I asked the Transport Secretary how many miles of British Rail track were subject to speed restrictions caused by reduced maintenance resulting from reductions in Government grant to BR (the PSO or public service obligation grant). I was told on 31 March - conveniently, the last day of the financial year - that the PSO grant had not been cut and that it stood at £1,150m for 1992/3 and £900m for 1991/2. I followed this up with another letter to Transport Minister, Roger Freeman MP, who now concedes the PSO grant for

the current year (that is from 1 April 1993) is plummeting to £850m - a cut of £300m."

"This Parliamentary pirouette is a complete waste of time. I still want to know how many miles of BR track have speed restrictions caused by reduced maintenance because of tight funding. I have therefore re-tabled a variation of my original question and this time I hope for a straight answer."

"Sometimes I feel like Inspector Morse tracking down someone who is particularly devious" sighed the MP.

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1993
64/93

GOVERNMENT WARNED OFF RAIL PENSION FUND

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has warned that pressure on the Government must be maintained over plans to hive off billions of pounds from the Railway Pension Fund to the Treasury.

Prentice said: "Our efforts so far have embarrassed them into promising a re-think. But they are not going to give up easily on a plan which has such major implications for Government finance.

There has been a storm of protest from railway pensioners, trade unions and Labour MPs since the Department of Transport published plans to split the Railway Pension Fund after privatisation. Under one option, a figure estimated at around £4.25 billion would be transferred to the Treasury which would then continue to guarantee payments to existing pensioners. However, increases above the annual rate of inflation would be ruled out. Labour has pressed for the retention of a national pension scheme for both existing pensioners and current employees.

The MP said: "The Government is going to look again at the options but I'm not taking anything for granted at this stage. Having gone this far with the idea of transferring huge sums to the Treasury to help them bring down the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement - now moving up to a staggering £50 billion - they are not going to abandon it without a fight. The prize at stake is even bigger than the Railway Pension Fund since the Post Office and the Coal Board Funds would go the same way if they got away with this one."

"Pension Fund money should be working for the people who paid into it - not used to bale out the Tories" said Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 22 April 1993
65/93

PRENTICE BACKS CALL FOR UN ACTION IN BOSNIA

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to stop the aggression and genocide in Bosnia. The MP wants the United Nations to issue an ultimatum to the Serbs, warning that continued aggression would result in military action.

Prentice said: "We have all been sickened and revolted by the terrible things we have seen on our TV screens. There are no easy answers to what is happening in the former Yugoslavia with its complex compendium of ethnic and religious groupings. But, that said, we cannot stand aside indefinitely while those practising ethnic cleansing, mass rape and genocide are allowed to get away with it."

"There was much talk a few years ago about a "New World Order" underpined by the United Nations. This is a test of it - on our own doorstep in Europe - and we should act.

"If we do nothing it will give the green light to fascists and nationalists in Eastern Europe and elsewhere who have territorial ambitions. And a refusal to act will also send signals to the Islamic world who will criticize the West for standing aside while Muslims were being slaughtered in their thousands."

Note to Editors: The Early Day Motion reads: "This House views with horror the inhuman assaults upon Srebrenica and other civilian populations in Bosnia; condemns territorial aggression and the policy of ethnic cleansing whether by Serbian or Croat forces; is revolted by the evidence of mass rape used as a deliberate strategy of war; doubts that sanctions alone will succeed; calls upon the United Nations to declare an ultimatum and, should that fail, to take decisive military action to end Serbian aggression; and therefore warmly welcomes the Leader of the Labour Party's statement on the use of air power in Bosnia".

For Immediate Release: 2 1993
66/93

PRENTICE VOTES FOR REFERENDUM ON MAASTRICHT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is supporting calls for a referendum on Maastricht - the Treaty on European Union. As the Committee stage of the Maastricht Bill moved into its final phase early this morning, the MP made a last ditch attempt to give the British people a say on this major constitutional measure. The Bill will have a report stage in the Commons and then go into the Lords where the referendum call is likely to surface again.

Prentice said: "The way in which clause 27 has been dealt with is simply astonishing. This clause on the Social Chapter was put forward by the Leader of the Opposition; it was selected for debate but, at the eleventh hour, the Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr Morris) decided it should not be voted on. There is no precedent for this whatsoever. This was the one amendment where the Government was certain to be defeated by a combination of Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tory dissident MPs. New clause 74 - which the Government apparently accepts - will allow a vote on the Social Chapter - but only after the Bill passes into law."

"If the House of Commons is not be be allowed a vote on the Social Chapter then the people should" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 22 April 1993
67/93

NO CHANGE IN PENDLE JOBLESS

Unemployment in Pendle is stuck over 3,000 for the fourth month running according to figures released by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP's ***Pendle Job Watch*** Bulletin - which charts the rise in local unemployment since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990 - shows the March jobless total at 3,025, down 6 from February.

Over the past six months, vacancies at Colne Job Centre have fluctuated around the 100 mark (from 114 to 93) with a steep drop in January to 49. In Nelson, vacancies have plunged from 368 in October 1992 to 128 last month. The MP said the collapse in vacancies was a real cause for concern.

Prentice said: "The figures are disappointing - especially after all the hype last month about the so called Budget for jobs. And the lay offs, announced recently, have yet to show up.

Note to Editors: In November 1990, unemployment stood at 1,708 in Pendle.

For Immediate Release: 21 April 1993
68/93

MP HAILS DECISION ON MOOR ISLES TIP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the decision by ***UK Waste*** not to appeal against Lancashire County Council's refusal to give planning permission to turn Moor Isles Farm into a landfill site. "Thousands of people will heave a massive sigh of relief at yesterday's wonderful news" said the MP.

Prentice continued: "The proposal to turn this attractive corner of Pendle into a giant rubbish tip has been hanging like a garbage wrapped Sword of Damocles over the heads of hundreds of my constituents who live in the immediate vicinity of Moor Isles Farm. Many people will be sleeping easier in their beds this evening."

"I want to thank all the people who made this possible. The County Council who refused planning permission; our own council here in Pendle who stood shoulder to shoulder with residents in resisting the proposal and the many people who were actively involved in the campaign to preserve this valuable green belt land."

The MP sounded a word of caution. "In these matters, eternal vigilance is always required. No-one wants another planning application for some other separate - but just as unwelcome - use to boomerang in on us."

For Immediate Release: 22 April 1993
69/93

CENSUS DATA HIGHLIGHTS HOUSING STRESS IN PENDLE

New data from the 1991 census shows Pendle as having one of the highest rates of owner occupation in England and Wales - with some of the worst housing problems.

The figures show that 79.1% of households in Pendle are owner occupied (ranked 62 out of 562 constituencies) and that over a third of these (34.6%) are owned outright (rank 46). Just under one third of all households (30.5%) have no central heating (rank 70. England and Wales 18.5%) and 1.45% share or have no bath or inside WC (rank 98. England and Wales 0.9%). 0.61% of all households have more than 1.5 persons per room (rank 119).

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "These figures show just how much work still needs to be done to bring our housing stock up to scratch. Our council is doing a magnificent job but they are pushing a boulder up a mountain unless they continue to get substantial aid from central government."

"Our local Council has its back up against the wall and - for the time being - has had to stop improvement grants. If ever there was a case for additional financial help to tackle housing stress, it is here in Pendle.

Table: Housing Tenure in England and Wales. % of households ranked highest to lowest (1 - 562)

Constituency	%owner occ	rank	%owned outright	rank	%rented private	rank	%Hsg Assoc	rank	%LA	rank
Pen	**79.1**	**62**	**34.6**	**46**	**5.7**	**333**	**1.6**	**402**	**12.7**	**424**
RV	84.4	14	34.6	44	4.8	389	2.3	277	5.8	551
Bur	74.3	171	27.9	168	6.3	283	2.5	244	15.8	329
E&W	67.8		24.5		7.3		3.2		19.8	

Pendle (Pen); RV (Ribble Valley); Bur (Burnley); E&W (England and Wales)

For Immediate Release: 26 April 1993
70/93

MP BACKS BED FIRM'S BID TO EXPAND BARNOLDSWICK PLANT

Barnoldswick based bed firm, ***Silentnight***, has won the backing of local MP, Gordon Prentice, for its plans to expand production at its plant in the town.

The company has told the MP it wants to concentrate production at one main plant to cut down on transport costs. At present materials are ferried from the plant at Keighley to Barnoldswick.

Silentnight has asked Pendle Council for planning permission to built on the Barnsey site which lies next door to the main Moss site. If the move gets the green light it will generate about 200 jobs in the town. Councillors will consider the proposal on 11 May.

Prentice said: "I have written to Pendle Borough Council to support the ***Silentnight*** application."

For Immediate Release: 26 April 1993
71/93

BARNOLDSWICK CO-OP BOOSTS AID FOR AFRICA

Last weekend's money raising event for Africa at Barnoldswick's Co-op was a great success says local MP, Gordon Prentice. Over £200 was donated at the Leo's store by local shoppers concerned about the plight of the continent's starving millions.

The nationwide initiative - jointly organised by the Co-op and Oxfam - will help set up businesses and provide much needed education for youngsters.

The MP said: "I was keen to back this event in the town which was organised in Pendle by local councillor Sally Lambert. And it was good of my colleague from the House of Commons - Ian McCartney MP, the chair of the North West Group of Labour MPs - to come to Barlick and lend support. Even when times are difficult it is heartening to know that local people are still more than ready to back something as worthwhile as this."

Note to Editors: This year, there is a planned increase of 1.5% in the overseas aid budget but the increase has been directed to the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. There is no increase in aid to developing countries. Figures from the non Party **World Development Movement** show that Britain cut its bi-lateral aid to Sub Saharan Africa by more than 22% in real terms between 1979 and 1990.

The **WDM** also found that between 1987 and 1990, collapsing commodity prices meant that the seven drought stricken Southern African countries of Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe had been running such a large trade deficit with Britain that they paid £227m more to Britain than we gave in aid (at 1985 prices).

For Immediate Release: 28 April 1993
72/93

PRENTICE HEARS "TICKING TIME BOMB" IN BUDGET

The March Budget was a "ticking time bomb" which will explode in the Government's face according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP - who was speaking in Monday's second reading debate of the Finance (No 2) Bill which carries the Budget proposals into law - said the delayed action tax increases would destroy the Tories' claim to be the Party of low taxation. He said the overall burden of taxation would rise, National Insurance Contributions would go up and VAT would be slapped on to fuel bills - each measure directly contradicting specific pledges given in last year's General Election campaign.

The MP said afterwards: "The Government generally relies on the "amnesia factor" - that people will forget the broken promises and the Tory tax bombshells. They hope we will forget about the £14 billion they squandered

on the Poll Tax and the increase in VAT from 15% to 17.5% which paid for the fiasco. And they hope we will forget about the £5 billion wasted last September 16 when Britain was pulled out of the ERM."

"From now until the next General Election, every Tory Budget is going to contain its own tax bombshell" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: The Government is introducing a new "unified" budget from November this year. It will combine the Autumn Statement (which sets out the Government's spending proposals) and the Budget Statement (which raises the money to pay for them).

For Immediate Release: 2 May 93
73/93

PRENTICE BACKS CAMPAIGN TO SAVE LOCAL CHEMIST SHOPS FROM CLOSURE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing local pharmacists in their fight to save many of Pendle's small chemists shops from closure. According to the area's pharmacists, the Government says all pharmacies dispensing less than 2,000 prescriptions per month are not making "a demonstrable contribution to the NHS" and plans to impose a cut in chemists' incomes of about £6,000 per pharmacy.

The MP said: "I was horrified to learn of the possible consequences to Pendle of these proposals. If they go ahead, it will mean whole areas of my constituency losing their local pharmacy - and the help and advice that is available there. I am told that a quarter of all pharmacies in Lancashire are likely to go under and that some here in Pendle - in towns such as Earby - are particularly vulnerable. I have written to the Health secretary, Virginia Bottomley, pressing for an early Commons Statement. This short sighted, hare brained proposal deserves to be stopped dead in its tracks. I shall be doing everything I can to support our local pharmacists."

Note to Editors: Pharmacists are paid a fee as part of their remuneration system for dispensing which is higher per prescription up to 1,700 items a month than it is thereafter. Government proposals made in March 1993 for the year from 1 April would •move towards a flat rate fee for dispensing and make other changes to the remuneration system and •introduce a "professional allowance" of £500 a month to pharmacies dispensing more than 2,000 items a month. An "Essential Small Pharmacies Scheme" tops up the income of small pharmacies that the Government considers essential. The profession is concerned that the Government's proposals do not sufficiently recognise the value of the small pharmacy and that as many as a quarter could be forced to close. A widening of the essential small pharmacies scheme has been considered but has not been negotiated in detail.

For Immediate Release: 2 May 93
74/93

PENDLE: THE WAY WE ARE NOW

Pendle is way above the average in England and Wales in the number of households which contain people with a long term illness which limits their ability to do things according to figures from the last census in 1991 and released this week by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The data shows that 15.1% of Pendle households contain someone with a limiting long term illness ranking the area 93rd out of the 562 constituencies in England and Wales.

The MP commented: "The census paints a fascinating picture of the way we are now. For example, we are well above average in the number of lone parents (4.17%) which puts us 173rd out of 562 and in the number of self employed (12.9%. Rank 166 out of 562). We are just above average in the number of pensioners (19.1%. Rank 225/562). And in Pendle we tend not to move house as often as people in some other parts of the country. 8.5% of us had a different address a year ago putting Pendle 368 out of 562."

"These figures are not simply interesting in their own right, they should provide a guide to central government in assessing the needs of the area. The present system of allocating money from central government borders on the deranged. We are asked to believe that councils such as Westminster and Wandsworth in London have greater needs than we have here in North East Lancashire. The census data in key areas such as housing, household amenities, car ownership and so on shows how bogus that claim was - and is."

For Immediate Release: 2 May 93
75/93

MP WARNS OF FURTHER POST OFFICE CLOSURES

A "cascade of closures" is the prospect in store for many of Pendle's sub post offices if the Government decides to stop the payment of benefits across post office counters in favour of direct payment into bank accounts.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, warned of the danger of closures after a top level meeting last week with the Managing Director of Post Office Counters, Richard Dykes.

The doomsday scenario from local MP, Gordon Prentice, is based on Government plans to cut back on social security spending as part of the "public expenditure reviews" commissioned by the Prime Minister earlier this year. Ministers believe the introduction of automated credit transfer (ACT) will save money and make a useful contribution to the cuts demanded from the ballooning social security budget.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "This is another example of the Government's "shoot first; ask questions later" policy. The introduction of ACT may indeed produce some initial savings but in the longer term it will be seen as a disastrous error of judgement. I have had a steady stream of letters from people fearful about the impact on Pendle's sub post offices. Our network of local post offices is too precious to be put at risk in this way."

"Instead of privatising the Post Office, the Government should give it the freedom to compete with other commercial organisations. Why can't the

nation's 20,000 post offices act as agents for the high street banks, insurance companies and even shops such as Marks and Spencer?

If ACT does go through, what about the 25% of people who receive state benefits who don't have a bank account?

more follows

And, assuming the banks accept them as new customers, what about the impact on their household budgets from bank charges if, as may happen, they go into the red? These proposals throw up a million questions the Government hasn't even begun to address."

ends

Note to Editors: The MP is backing moves in the House of Commons to prevent the introduction of ACT. The text of the Early Day Motion reads:

"That this House believes that the introduction of automated credit transfer for pensions and welfare payments will deal a crushing blow to post offices throughout Britain; deplores the inevitable closure of many rural post offices as a consequence; condemns the inevitable loss of service to thousands of pensioners for whom the weekly visit to the post office is a valuable source of information, advice and social contact; and calls upon the Government to live up to it's own Citizen's Charter and to its commitment to freedom of choice and the provision of services to suit the convenience of customers, rather than of bureaucrats, by abandoning those proposals."

For Immediate Release: 10 May 1993
76/93

PRENTICE ACCUSES TORIES OF "MONEY LAUNDERING"

The Conservative Party should hand back to creditors of Polly Peck International the £1.5m given to the Party by the disgraced company chairman, Asil Nadir, says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Nadir, who jumped bail last week and flew to Turkish occupied Cyprus, was made bankrupt in November 1991 owing personal creditors £90m. Since the collapse of the Polly Peck empire, the MP has been pressing the Tory Party to disclose the full amount donated by Nadir and take steps to return the money to the collapsed company's creditors. "Now that Nadir has fled the country and is a fugitive from British justice, the case for returning the cash is unanswerable" says the MP.

Prentice said: "Many Conservatives must feel absolutely sickened, as I do, at the way in which their Party takes millions from anonymous, rich foreigners and people charged with serious criminal offences. Asil Nadir's cash gift of £1.5m worked out at £2,369 for every Constituency Conservative Association in Great Britain. John Latsis, the Greek shipping tycoon, donated £2 million to the Tories in 1991 - equal to £3,159 per constituency in Great Britain. These two cash gifts together amounted to £5,528 for every local Conservative Association in the land - pretty close to a constituency's legal limit in last year's Election."

"Unlike the Labour Party, the Conservative Party does not publish its accounts and it is high time it did. Recent press reports suggest that foreigners out to buy influence with a Conservative Government - poured millions of pounds into the Tory Party's General Election warchest. Until the Tories tell us where they get their money from, people will rightly believe Tory Central Office lies at the heart of a sophisticated money laundering operation."

For Immediate Release: 10 May 1993
77/93

"GO FREE RANGE!" says PRENTICE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is out to persuade more people to give battery hens a break. The MP - who is a keen supporter of animal welfare issues - is backing the campaign by the *Compassion in World Farming Trust* to promote free range eggs and to show people how hens live in the battery cage.

The *CIWF Trust's* special double decker bus will be touring the country accompanied by "Hetty" their giant ex-battery hen. The Pendle MP will be launching the Trust's Roadshow at London's Covent Garden on Tuesday 11 May.

For Immediate Release: 10 May 1993
78/93

PENDLE MP SAYS TALK OF LIB-LAB PACT IS "FANCIFUL"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has ridiculed talk of "Lib-Lab" pacts following last Thursday's County Council Elections and the Newbury By Election. He claims the disastrous showing by the Tories and the capture of Newbury by the Liberal Democrats have obscured the "enormously strong" position of the Labour Party in local government.

"The Tories have all but been wiped out as a national force in local government. They are reduced to running a single county council, one metropolitan council, no Scottish region and just 11 out of 32 London Boroughs. And as for the Liberal Democrats, the excellent profile of their Newbury campaign on BBC's *On the Record* programme on Sunday 9 May confirmed what many of us long suspected. They'll sell their grannies to get elected - saying one thing to Tory inclined voters and exactly the opposite to appeal to Labour supporters. They kept one Liberal Democrat MP well away from Newbury. David Alton told the *Catholic Herald* in September 1991 he would have "no fundamental objection" to entering into some kind of working arrangement with a Conservative administration led by John Major. Heaven forbid!

Note for Editors: For the first time ever, Labour has more county councillors than any other Party - 1,388 at the last count, to the Tories' 967 and the Liberals' 874. The County results gave Labour 41% of the vote, the Tories 31% and the Lib Dems 24% - enough for a healthy Commons majority. However, these figures underestimate the true level of support for the Party across the country as the big urban metropolitan districts, London and

Scotland were not voting. In Pendle on May 6, Labour polled the largest number of votes. The Conservatives took 14% of the vote - down 26% since the April 92 general Election - the Liberal Democrats took 38% - up 23% - and Labour held steady with 45% - up 1% since the General Election (Sunday Times 9 May).

For Immediate Release: 11 May 1993
79/93

PENDLE MP STEPS INTO SHOPS BILL CONTROVERSY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is bidding to change the Shops (Amendment) Bill this Friday when it returns to the floor of the House after extensive debate in Committee during March. The MP wants the Bill's restrictions on Sunday trading loosened to allow bookstores, video shops and record stores to stay open.

Prentice has tabled amendments which would permit a shop to open on Sundays between 9am and 8pm provided the principal goods sold included books, videos and recordings whether on disc or tape and the turnover from these amounted to at least 80% of the total turnover from all goods sold in the shop.

Prentice said: "The Government has promised to bring forward its own Bill to clarify the law on Sunday trading but it is still taking shape somewhere in the Home Office. The Powell Bill - which provides for a general prohibition on Sunday trading - is the only one that is before the Commons at present and, one way or the other, we've got to take a view on it."

"Powell's Bill was amended in Committee to allow DIY stores to open on Sundays. If DIY can be regarded as a leisure pursuit appropriate for Sunday, then why, for goodness sake, can't reading or listening to music be viewed in the same way. I have said all along that the Powell Bill was replacing one set of anomalies with another and it has emerged from Committee peppered with them."

"My amendments will at least give the reading public an opportunity to browse in a bookshop on a Sunday - just as valid a past-time in my view as leafing through a gardening book at a garden centre or dipping into a car repair manual at a DIY centre."

For Immediate Release: 11 May 1993
80/93

PRENTICE DEMANDS AFFORDABLE HOUSING ASSOCIATION RENTS

A crisis meeting last Friday between Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and the Regional Manager of the Bradford and Northern Housing Association, David Barrow, spelt out the implications for Pendle if the Government's plan to jack up housing association rents succeeds. B&N has 149 properties in Colne, 125 in Nelson and 55 in Brierfield with more under construction.

Figures released by the National Federation of Housing Associations in March showed that in Lancashire, working households becoming association tenants would face an average rent of £75.86p in 1996 compared with £43.53p in 1992. Four out of five new tenants in work would be spending more than a third of their income on rent in 1996 compared with one in three last year.

The MP said: "These stratospheric rent increases can be laid at the door of the Government which is planning to cut the Housing Association Grant from 67% in 1993/4 to 60% in 1994/5 and down to 55% by 1995/6. As grant goes down the costs to tenants goes up - it's as simple as that. There is an another absurdity which is a direct result of government policy. There is now in place a ludicrous dual rent structure which means tenants living in exactly the same type of property can pay very different rents depending on whether they were there before or after 15 January 1989. It causes bewilderment, anger and resentment."

ends

Note to Editors: The following background note comes from the National Federation of Housing Associations: Up to 1989, Housing Associations benefited from a system of capital funding where the rent of a property bore no relationship to the cost of provision.

All tenancies were known as Secure Tenancies and the rents were set every two years by an independent Rent Officer. The rents were set based upon Fair Rent principles established in the Rent Act 1977. The Rent Officer entered the Fair Rents in a Register and the Registered Rent was the maximum which the association could charge.

The cost of providing the property would be met by a small loan to the Housing Association from the Housing Corporation, the loan being calculated based upon the amount which could be repaid by the rent, after deducting the cost of management and maintenance. The balance of the capital cost of the property would be met by Housing Association Grant. This could be anything from 90% to 100% of the capital cost of the property.

Two forms of Grant

In addition to this, there were two other forms of grant available to Housing Associations. The first was a grant for Major Repairs, which was available to cover the cost of any future major expenditure on repairs. The second grant (Revenue Deficit Grant) was available to cover any shortfall in income due to rents failing to keep pace with the reasonable running costs of the property.

This system was considered to be costly and wasteful by Government and in 1988, the Government introduced a new system of funding for Housing Associations which was intended to reduce their dependence upon Government grants and loans, produce more rented homes at less capital cost to the Government, and lead to an increase in rents to reflect the true cost of providing social rented housing.

The new capital funding system, introduced by the Housing Act 1988, is based upon a reduced level of Housing Association Grant, with rents taking the strain. The grant is based upon a fixed percentage of the indicative cost of building a property. In addition, the new funding system was designed to abolish the Major Repairs Grant and the Revenue Deficit Grant.

New type of tenancy

In order to bring about this change, the Government had to introduce a new form of tenancy. The Housing Act 1988 abolished rent control on all new tenancies which commenced after 15th January 1989. All lettings after this date are on Assured Tenancies. There are a number of differences between Assured Tenancies (post 15th January 1989) and Secure Tenancies (up to 15th January 1989), the main two differences being; an end to the Right-to-Buy and the removal from rent control and the jurisdiction of the Rent Officer.

Housing Associations are now required by the Housing Corporation, in Circular HC 60/89, to set rents for Assured Tenancies at a level which takes account of the need to cover the costs of loan charges, management, maintenance, insurance, and provisions for future repairs.

Maximising rent

They are also expected to maximise rental income on all their properties, whether newly provided, relet or already occupied to ensure that the minimum amount of subsidy per home is required.

In order to ensure that rents started to rise, and to provide more rented homes for the same level of public investment, the Government began to cut the capital subsidy available to Housing Associations. Since 1988, this has been gradually reduced from 85% to it's present average level of 67% Housing Association Grant, with an ultimate objective of a national average of 55% in 1995. In the Northern Regions, this will equate to 45% average grant. The balance of the cost of funding a project now has to be met by borrowing from the private sector.

However, the Government did issue guidance that Housing Associations must charge "affordable rents" which are within reach of those in low paid employment. Unfortunately, the Government did not define what it meant by an affordable rent. In the absence of any guidance, Housing Associations have had to assume that the Cost Rents which are now a direct product of the Government's capital funding system represent the levels which associations are now required to charge.

To ensure fairness in the setting of rents for Assured Tenancies, the Association has produced a Rent Policy which determines the rent of each property based upon its size, amenities, age, location and condition. Rents for Secure Tenancies are still set independently of the Association by the Rent Officer.

Rents rising faster the inflation

In accordance with Government policy, Housing Association rents across the country are now rising much faster than inflation and much faster than the incomes of our tenants.

There are three additional points which should be noted about rent setting for Assured Tenancies :-

- Unlike Secure Tenancies, where rents are fixed every two years on the anniversary date of the registration of the Fair Rent, rents for Assured Tenancies are reviewed every year on the anniversary date of the commencement of the tenancy.

• Most new properties are now subject to substantial mortgages, and are therefore susceptible to rises in interest rates, a factor which was not applicable before 1988. Our rents are now set at a level which should take account of fluctuations in interest rates over the term of the mortgage. However, associations must keep a close watch on the mortgage repayment profile to ensure that rents are sufficient to repay the loans.

• Assured Tenants have the right to appeal against the proposed rent to the Rent Assessment Committee. The Committee will then assess a Market Rent for the property which will become the maximum rent payable until the next review. As the Rent Assessment Committee can only determine a market rent, this can often be higher than the rent originally proposed by the Association. However, in this situation, the Association would not charge the market rent. If the Rent Assessment Committee were to determine a lower rent, then the Association would have no hesitation in reducing the rent and would have met its obligations to maximise rents.

The current confusion and apparent inequity is caused by Government Policy which requires the Association to operate two forms of tenancy with two different rent structures, neither having any relevance to the personal circumstances of the tenant and being simply based upon whether the tenancy commenced before or after the 15th January 1989.

For Immediate Release: 12 May 1993
81/93

PENDLE MP BACKS NEW FE BODY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the new *Association for Colleges,* set up to champion the interests of further education with Government and Parliament and the world of industry and commerce.

The MP told Dr Helen Gilchrist, Principal of Pendle's Nelson and Colne College, and other AoC Board Members at a reception at Westminster today that the new organisation could expect his full support. "The new national system of further education came into being on 1 April this year and is now a fact of life. I didn't agree with the new structure - which marginalises the local authorities - but given it is now in place the colleges clearly need a voice at national level."

"Under this Government, education has been neglected and under funded for far too long. And - at least for the moment - it has to bear the cross of being subject to the whims and caprices of an Education Secretary, John Patten, who has an exalted opinion of his own abilities. His back tracking on school testing was as much overdue as it was inevitable given the extent of the opposition throughout education. But the fact that no changes are proposed for this year is absolutely inexplicable."

ends

Note to editors: The Pendle MP met Dr Helen Gilchrist, Principal of Nelson and Colne College, who is an elected Board member of the new Association. The new system was established on 1 April 1993 when further education and sixth form colleges were incorporated. their core funds, which were previously provided by local authorities, are now channelled through national funding agencies. In England there are 223 general FE colleges, 64 tertiary colleges, 117 sixth form colleges, 13 colleges of art and design and 35 colleges of agriculture.

For Immediate Release: 18 May 1993
82/93

MP GETS HEAVY POSTBAG ON THREAT TO PENDLE'S POST OFFICES

The Government's threat to stop benefit payments over Post Office counters in favour of direct payment into bank accounts has generated an enormous postbag of complaints from local people according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"Every delivery brings a further flood of letters from furious pensioners and others receiving benefits. Without exception, they are outraged that our local sub post offices could face closure if the plan to transfer benefit payments to the banks gets the go-ahead. I have already asked the Social Security Minister to come clean on the Government's intentions and, typically, I was told that the payment of social security benefits was a matter for the Benefits Agency - not for the Government.

"The Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Michael Bichard, told me that *"in line with a commitment made in the Citizen's Charter, automated credit transfer is being made available for a wider range of benefits. The savings resulting from this extension will depend how many recipients select ACT as a method of payment. If all social security recipients were paid in this manner, this would lead to administrative savings of around £475m a year."*

The MP commented: "We are at the top of a very slippery slope. The Benefits Agency doesn't have to take into account the devastating effect of post office closures on local communities. If the payment methods are changed willy nilly with no regard to the consequences for pensioners and others, the damage done to the social fabric will be incalculable."

Note to Editors: There will be a debate in the Commons tomorrow, Wednesday 19th May, on the ACT proposals and the impact on post offices.

For Immediate Release: 19 May 1993
83/93

HELP FOR TEXTILE AREAS "STILL UP IN THE AIR" says Pendle MP

Cash help from the European Community for the nation's beleaguered textile areas could be jeopardised by foot dragging by the British Government according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP clashed with Industry Minister, Tim Sainsbury, on the implications of any delay in getting approvals for the 67 applications which are bidding for Euro cash earmarked for textile areas like Pendle. An application - worth £720,000 - has been lodged by Lancashire Enterprises on behalf of six North East Lancashire local authorities. The MP told the Commons that approval of the bid will mean cash help for 200 local companies.

Prentice said afterwards: "The Minister's reply was totally unconvincing. He was unable to tell me why the British Government insists on receiving bids for programmes 12 months long while every other EC country can submit 5 year schemes. This is another example of the chronic short termism of the Government which insists on interposing itself between Brussels and the local authorities here that are bidding for Euro cash."

Note to Editors: RETEX is a Community initiative created by the European Commission to aid regions heavily dependent on the textile and clothing sector. According to the Commission, the purpose of RETEX is "to accelerate the diversification of economic activities in regions heavily dependent on the textiles and clothing sector so as to render them less dependent on this sector and to encourage the adjustment of commercially viable businesses in all sectors of industrial activity". Although it is geared largely towards the heavily textile dependent Objective 1 areas in countries like Greece and Portugal, 20% of RETEX funds are earmarked Europe wide for Objective 2 areas which includes areas such as Lancashire. The Pendle MP is pressing for an assurance that the dispute between the UK and the EC over the 1 and 5 year programmes will not result in the cash being held back from East Lancashire.

For Immediate Release: 12 May 1993
84/93

PATTEN FAILS LISTENING TEST

Gordon Prentice, MP for Pendle, slammed the response of the Education Secretary, John Patten to the teachers' boycott of the Standard Assessment Tests. "Only three days ago the Prime Minister promised he would start listening to people and at the first opportunity the Secretary of State turns a deaf ear to the overwhelming outcry against these tests."

"The Education Secretary was forced to make a humiliating statement in the House of Commons that he would make changes to the tests which everyone - teachers, governors and parents - have condemned as fatally flawed. But his arrogance would not let him make the changes this year and so 14 year old pupils will have to be guinea pigs for tests which are to be abandoned."

"It is arrant nonsense to go ahead with these tests under the circumstances. If the Secretary of State had bothered to listen over the past months, he would never have ended up in this mess. Why should this year's fourteen year olds be experimented on in this way?"

Predicting a 90% turnout in the NUT ballot to be announced on Thursday and an overwhelming vote of support for the boycott, Prentice added: "Jam tomorrow brings few crumbs of comfort to schools starved of commonsense from the Secretary of State."

For Immediate Release: 18 May 1993
85/93

TV RECEPTION "A BIG SWITCH OFF"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is battling to put Pendle in the picture. He claims that a quarter of his constituents can't tune in to BBC North West or ITV's Granada and vital news about what's happening in Lancashire never gets a look in.

The MP said: "This is no laughing matter. If people cannot see and hear reports about their own area and those who represent them, it damages our democracy. We've just had important elections for Lancashire County Council and thousands of my constituents in areas such as Barnoldswick and Earby have more chance of finding out what is going on at County Hall by reading the tea leaves in the bottom of their tea cups than by turning on the TV."

"I know just how frustrating it is. I live in Barnoldswick and feel completely cut off. I get excellent programmes from Yorkshire and from the BBC in Leeds but there is absolutely nothing about the North West region. I have written to the BBC and the Independent Television Commission to press for additional transmitters to allow people to tune into BBC North West and Granada ***in addition to*** the Yorkshire programmes. I am also taking the issue up with the Heritage Secretary, Peter Brook. I am certainly not suggesting for one moment that one should be at the expense of the other."

Prentice said: "The BBC engineers tell me that "*footprints"* occur in parts of the country where reception is poor or non existent. While this is interesting it is not an unchangeable fact of life. I shall be pressing for a new transmitter in Pendle and I want to hear from anyone who can't receive BBC North West and Granada and who wants to receive these programmes in addition to those from Yorkshire. Every letter I receive is more ammunition in the battle to get Pendle tuned into the rest of the North West."

For Immediate Release: 18 May 1993
86/93

ROYAL NAVY "HAS MORE ADMIRALS THAN SHIPS" claims Pendle MP

The House of Commons was rocked today by claim and counterclaim about the number of ships in the Royal Navy and the number of admirals who command them.

Defence Minister, Archie Hamilton MP, told the Commons the Navy had 59 major ships and 42 admirals. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, hit back with authoritative figures from the House of Commons library which showed the Navy had 41 major ships and 42 admirals - the first time in the history of the senior service that there was more than one admiral per ship.

Prentice said afterwards: "There's a lot of juggling with statistics going on in the Ministry of Defence. They are including ships so small they would be more suited to Captain Birdseye than a full blown admiral."

"It is as plain as a pikestaff that our Navy is disappearing before our eyes - just like our merchant fleet which has all but gone. The Government's Defence Review ***Options for Change*** envisages a Navy of between 35 and 38 ships. Yet, despite this, the Government is spending millions on Trident - a real white elephant if ever there was one - and looks like pressing ahead with the £3 billion nuclear tipped Tactical Air to Surface Missile. The Government's priorities are all wrong."

Note to Editors: Last year, the Navy cut back on exercises by 25% to save fuel.

For Immediate Release: 19 May 1993
87/93

MP BACKS MOVE TO FREE NELSON MAN BEHIND BARS FOR 22 YEARS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing the Parole Board to free a local man imprisoned 22 years ago for a crime he says he never committed.

The MP has actively lobbied successive Home Secretaries - first Kenneth Baker and now Kenneth Clarke - to open the prison door and let Anthony Alexandrowicz (Alex) walk free. Now his case is to be considered by the Parole Board on 22/24 June 1993.

Prentice said: "I understand that all the reports submitted from those in the prison and probation services as well as the medical people say quite unequivocally that Alex will pose no threat to the public and that his date for release is long overdue. They recommend that he should be released into an approved hostel. However, I am told the Home Office recommend that Alex should be sent to a "Category D Open Prison". If this were to happen Alex would have to spend up to another three years in the open prison until his case for release could be reviewed again. For a man who has spent so long in prison already this would be a further cruel torture. I am determined to do everything I possibly can to secure Alex's release."

ends

Note to Editors
Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in prison for twenty two years for a crime which, he maintains, he did not commit. Alexandrowicz was born in Nelson in Lancashire. He had a difficult home life and he was taken into care at the age of 12 because of violence in the family. After he left Approved School he became a small time burglar. When he was 17, he allegedly broke into a house in Preston and stabbed the woman living there in the breast and stomach. She left the hospital the same day as she was admitted.

more follows

At the police station he made a confession - which he now says was made under duress. To this day, he maintains he is innocent. At the time, the psychiatric reports labelled him as someone prone to depression. However, he was not sent to a place where his condition could be treated but to an ordinary prison. He was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for wounding and aggravated burglary. He ended up in Parkhurst as a Category A prisoner. The experience brutalised him and he had a number of run ins with the prison authorities.

In 1988, three prison governors and two psychiatrists recommended to the Parole Board that he should be released. The Parole Board agreed and, in turn, reported to the Home Secretary who turned down the recommendation. The medical evidence confirmed that he was no danger to society.

The Granada TV programme advances one - very far fetched - theory in an attempt to explain the Home Office decision. Alexandrowicz is of Russian extraction. Although he knew his father had served with the Red Army he (Alexandrowicz) knew nothing of his grandparents. When Alexandrowicz was 16 he went to the Soviet Embassy to ask if they could help trace his long lost grandparents. When he was 21, Alexandrowicz applied for Soviet citizenship. The TV programme suggests that this found its way into Home Office files and prejudiced his chance of release from prison.

With all hope gone, he decided to escape from the open prison he was in. He contacted the TV people; gave them his story and then turned himself in. He is now back in prison - along with some 300 discretionary life prisoners who are now eligible for review under the new Criminal Justice Act 1991. The Home secretary told Prentice on 5 November 1992 "It is for the Parole Board to decide the order in which these cases are heard. To assist in this task, the Board is provided with a list of those eligible in each prison establishment... Mr Alexandrowicz will be notified as soon as his case is listed for hearing." Alex now has a date for the Parole Board hearing.

For immediate release: 20 May 1993
88/93

PENDLE JOBLESS DIPS BELOW 3,000

Pendle's unemployment figure dropped below 3,000 bringing a glimmer of good news to the area's jobless. The April total is 53 fewer than the 3,025 registered in March. Vacancies are slightly down at Colne Job Centre and up 30 at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I welcome this drop in the jobless totals coming as they do against a backdrop of closures and redundancies. However, I have to say it is curious that the official unemployment figures defy the evidence of our own eyes. Today's *Financial Times* shows how the unemployment figures have been massaged and manipulated in the past and I note that Mr Paul Gregg of the National Institute of Economic and Social

Research says there could be little doubt there was "a bit of reclassification going on".

"My question to John Major this month is no different from last month. How long it will take him to get Pendle's unemployment down to the level he inherited from his predecessor in November 1990 when it stood at 1,708?"

ends

Note to Editors: The following article *"Measures which obscured the extent of joblessness"* appeared in the FT of 20 May 1993.
November 1981: New rate of supplementary benefit introduced for men over 60 who had been on supplementary benefit for more than a year. No longer required to sign on as available for work in order to receive the benefit. Estimated to have removed 37,000 men from the claimant count over the ensuing year.

October 1982: Registration at Jobcentres becomes voluntary. Count at Jobcentres no longer provided a meaningful measure of unemployment so basis of unemployment statistics switched to count of claimants at unemployment benefit offices. This cut the count by 190,000 as a result of more up-to-date record-keeping (-78,000), the exclusion of registrants not claiming benefit (-135,000), and inclusion of the severely disabled (+23,000).

Budget 1983: About 162,000 men, mainly over 60, allowed to receive national insurance credits or the higher long term rate of supplementary benefit without needing to attend an unemployment benefit office.

September 1988: The Social Security Act changed the benefit entitlements of under 18s, removing an estimated 90,000 from the headline total.

July 1989: Redundant Mineworkers Payment Scheme changed so that people covered by the scheme no longer need to sign on as unemployed and available for work in order to receive scheme benefits - 15,500 estimated to have left the count As a result.

October 1989: Social Security Act makes receipt of benefit conditional on claimants proving they are actively seeking work. It also provideed that after a permitted period the level of remuneration will not be good cause for claimants turning down or failing to take advantage of an employment opportunity. Unemployment Unit calculates this led to a fall of 50,000 on the monthly count.

December 1989: Changes in the way earnings affect unemployment benefit. Part-time or casual workers earning enough to pay national insurance contributions in any week denied unemployment benefit for the week. Unemployment Unit estimates this led to fall of 30,000 in count.
Source: Department of Employment and Unemployment Unit

For Immediate Release: 18 May 1993
90/93

LABOUR'S HEALTH WARNING: COMMUNITY PHARMACIES AT RISK

Local MP, Gordon Prentice is determined to stop the loss of any local pharmacies and is joining Labour's campaign, launched by Shadow Health Minister Dawn Primarolo MP, to get the Government to withdraw its controversial plans to pay a professional allowance only to those pharmacies dispensing more than 2,000 prescriptions a month.

In this area, like all others in England and Wales, this would lead to the closure of many local pharmacies. Figures released by the Pharmaceutical Negotiating Services Committee show that in Lancashire 69 out of 302 pharmacies dispense fewer than 2,000 prescriptions per month. This represents 23% of the total compared with the average in England of 29%.

Dawn Primarolo has derided the proposals as "bad for patients and bad for small businesses" and the PSNC is running a local campaign with posters in pharmacies.

Gordon Prentice said: "The Department of Health claim that if a pharmacy does not dispense more than 2,000 prescriptions a month it is not *making a demonstrable contribution to the NHS*. This is insulting. It is also nonsense. I do not want to see any patient lose their local community pharmacy and people should sign the petitions at their local chemists shop.

Dawn Primarolo MP added: "There are persistent rumours that the Government are so embarrassed by their proposals that they will be withdrawing them. However, no announcement has been made and none is expected until the DOH and the PSNC meet on the 15th June. Meanwhile local pharmacies remain fearful and the public remain in the dark. This is no way to run our NHS."

For Immediate Release: 20 May 1993
91/93

HOUSING MARKET PACKAGE FAILS AREAS WITH HOUSING STRESS says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted Norman Lamont's *Housing Market Package* - unveiled in last year's Autumn Statement - as an expensive failure. He says the initiative, held out as a major step to help people in the greatest housing need, completely mismatches the areas of greatest housing need with those areas that actually received the cash help.

"Analysis of the Housing Corporation returns for the *Housing Market Package* reveals that only 28 homes were made available to Housing Associations in Pendle compared with 44 to Housing Associations in the Prime Minister's leafy area of Huntingdon."

"No one in their right mind would argue that Huntingdon has greater needs than Pendle and yet the PM's backyard gets extra help. In April 1992, there were 2,901 households on the council waiting list in Pendle (65% when expressed as a proportion of the council housing stock) compared with 2,692 in Huntingdon (35%). The Government would have been better off helping local authorities in their efforts to lease private sector properties and by pressing building societies to promote mortgage to rent schemes to avert further repossessions."

Note to Editors: Analysis of the Housing Corporation returns on the number and type of properties acquired under the Housing Market Package reveals that 49% of the properties were acquired from builders and developers, 42% from private treaty sales and only 6.2% were repossessed properties. The Housing Market Package has done little to help people in the greatest housing need. With 141,000 homeless families and a further 62,740 in temporary accommodation there is a desperate shortage of homes to rent. In spending nearly £600m of public money the Government has not fulfilled its promise to bring repossessed homes back into use.

For immediate release: 26 May 1993
92/93

PHOTOCALL: Oxfam Shop, Nelson
Saturday 5 June 1993 at 2pm

MP VOLUNTEERS TO MIND THE SHOP

Local people who drop into the Oxfam Shop in Nelson on Saturday week could be served by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who has volunteered to be a shop assistant for the afternoon.

The initiative is part of National Volunteer Week (1 - 7 June) designed to encourage people to give part of the spare time over to volunteer work for charities such as Oxfam.

Slipping effortlessly into the salesperson mode, the MP commented: "I guarantee all shoppers a warm welcome on Saturday 5 June - whether they are there to browse or buy. You can pick up good quality merchandise at Oxfam shops for very little."

For immediate release: 25 May 1993
93/93

PRENTICE SLAMS NEW ASSISTED AREAS MAP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says the new assisted areas map - due to be published in July but leaked in the press today - should be torn up and the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, told to go back to the drawing board.

Pendle's bid for inclusion in the new map of "assisted areas" was knocked back. Other areas in Lancashire that lost out include Blackburn, Accrington and Rossendale.

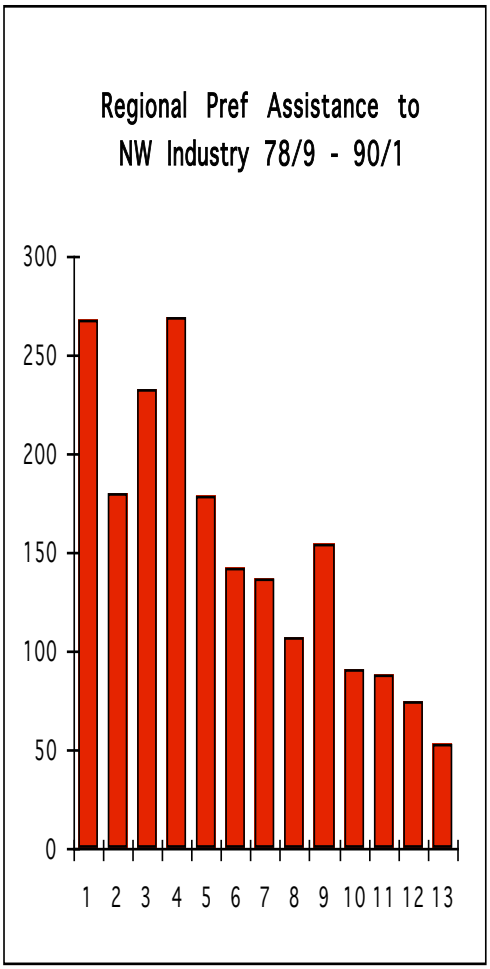
Assisted areas qualify for special help through Regional Selective Assistance Grants and Regional Enterprise Grants - designed to help firms create or safeguard existing jobs and invest in new products.

Prentice said: "If the leaked report is accurate, the North West has been given a real kick in the teeth. It is quite unbelievable that my own area - devastated by redundancies and closures - has not been given a look in while places like the Environment Secretary's constituency of Folkestone get assisted area

status. The North West has been hammered for more than a decade. Since 1978/9 Government spending in the North West on regional preferential assistance to industry has been cut by 80% - the biggest percentage reduction of any region in Britain. In 78/9 the government was spending £267m on North West industry. By 1991, this figure had collapsed to £53m."

ends

Note to Editors : The assisted areas map was last reviewed in 1984. The criteria used in the current review included unemployment levels; future demand for jobs in an area and the growth/decline in local industries; demographic changes; urban problems; distance from markets etc. Getting on the Assisted Areas map makes it more likely that an area will benefit from EC Regional Policy.



For Immediate Release: 25 May 1993
94/93

MP STEPS UP PRESSURE TO CATCH ASSASSINS OF NELSON MAN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is asking the President of Pakistan to intervene personally to help track down the killer of Mohammed Afzal, a Nelson taxi driver, who was gunned down in Jaurah Village, Pakistan, on 4 October last year.

In his letter to President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the MP said he had been in touch with the High Commission in London on a number of occasions but to no avail. "It is now 8 months since my constituent was murdered, and I haven't received any kind of report about the murder investigation from the Pakistan authorities - not even a single side of A4. It is as if my inquiries have just disappeared into the ether."

"Way back in January I went to see the Acting High Commissioner with the murdered man's widow, Elizabeth Afzal, and with his brother, Zafar Iqbal who miraculously survived the murderous attack. However, eight months of steady and insistent pressure have produced absolutely nothing and my approach to the President is my last throw of the dice before I seek to raise the issue on the floor of the House of Commons.

"I sometimes feel the only way I shall make progress is to go to Pakistan myself and make a citizen's arrest. I am not the kind of person who will let something drop" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: On 14 October 1992, Prentice passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister responsible at the Foreign Office. On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers of Mohammed Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets (more)

on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal returned to the UK and is now recovering from the ordeal. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

On 10 November Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps had been take to help the Pakistani authorities to apprehend the killers of Mohammed Afzal in Jaurah village, Pakistan on 4th October. The Minister (Mark Lennox Boyd MP) told the MP: "Mr Afzal was a dual British-Pakistani national, and the United Kingdom has no standing under international law to intervene in the investigation of his murder, which is being conducted by the Pakistani police. Our High Commission in Islamabad is, however, maintaining contact with the Pakistani authorities."

The MP has received no written (or oral) report whatsoever - either from the Pakistani authorities or from the Foreign Office - on the progress of the police investigation.

For Immediate Release: 25 May 1993
95/93

PRENTICE RIDICULES "PUFFING BILLY"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told a packed House of Commons today he wants action to lift the 20mph speed limit for trains on the Nelson to Colne railway line.

Prentice told Tony Newton MP - who was standing in for the Prime Minister at Question Time today - that the trains in his constituency were travelling 9 miles slower than the first ever passenger train in England. "In 1829, George Stephenson's Rocket achieved a speed of 29mph on its journey from Liverpool to Manchester. Now, 164 years later, my local trains are chugging along at a slower speed."

The MP told the House he had a letter from the Chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid, making it clear the 20mph speed restriction was permanent unless more funding became available from the Government.

Prentice said afterwards: "It is as plain as a pikestaff the current troubles result from years of chronic under-investment in our rail system. Rail privatisation is no answer. We have a puffing billy at the moment but after privatisation we'll have no railway at all."

ends

Note to Editors: The Railways Bill - privatising large parts of the rail network - is completing its Commons Report stage today. It will then go into the Lords.

For Immediate Release: 27 May 1993
96/93

PROFITS UP AGAIN AT NW WATER

North West Water yesterday reported increased profits for the year to 31 March 1993. Pre-tax profits are up 7% from £230m to £247.1m. Average price rises of 9% helped boost the profits bonanza.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "We are used to being soaked by North West Water so these latest figures come as no surprise. In the year to March 1992 pre tax profits were up 7.3% to £230m. Everyone is fed up paying through the nose for ordinary tap water."

Note to Editors: The average household bill for unmetered water in the North West was £169 in April 1993 - up from £156 in April 1992. This was made up of a water element of £79 (up 9% from £73) and sewerage £90 (up 8.4% from £83). In the North West, water charges sky-rocketed by 41% from 1989 to 1992.

For Immediate Release: 27 May 1993
97/93

PENDLE MP SAYS CABINET RESHUFFLE WILL NOT SAVE MAJOR

A Cabinet reshuffle won't save Major's bacon according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster, minutes after the news broke that Chancellor Norman Lamont was to be ditched, the Pendle MP said:

"We knew the sharks in the Tory Party were out for blood after Newbury and the humiliation of the local elections which left the Tories in control of a single County Council, Buckinghamshire. Major has given his critics what they wanted. He has thrown his Chancellor overboard but who got the country into this sorry mess in the first place? The Prime Minister's hand was on the tiller - not Norman Lamont's.

"Kenneth Clarke, the new Chancellor, has a poisoned inheritance. A ballooning deficit of £50 billion which will have to be financed by savage cuts in spending or further tax increases - probably both. A quick costume change by a few Cabinet Ministers will not change that stark fact."

"A year after the election - which the Government won on the back of the lie that it would not raise taxes - the Tories are in deep trouble. They devalued our currency. Pulled us of the ERM when they said they would not - and wasted £5 billion of our money in the process. They are destroying our railway system. Closing down our coal industry. Frightening pensioners by their insane attacks of our post offices. Hiking up VAT on fuel. And now the Prime Minister is asking the country to believe a few new faces heralds a new dawn. If anyone should be asked to fall on his sword, it should be our soap box orator, the Prime Minister himself."

For Immediate Release: 7 June 1993
98/93

MP CALLS FOR VOLUNTEERS!

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has issued a call for volunteers to help out at Oxfam's Scotland Road shop in Nelson. The MP, who spent Saturday afternoon (5 June) working behind the counter and sorting clothes in the back room, is looking for another six people to lend a hand in this busy shop.

Prentice said: "The afternoon I spent with Oxfam was a real eye-opener. The quality of the clothes that local people give to Oxfam is incredibly high and nothing gets onto a hanger unless it's in absolutely tip top condition. Some of the clothes find their way to Bosnia and other areas of conflict so when people shop at Oxfam or give clothes they no longer need they are making a really positive contribution."

ends

Note to Editors: The Scotland Road shop has a turnover of £44,000 a year. Volunteers are needed to work 9.30am - 1pm or 1pm - 4.30pm. Volunteers can choose how many days in a week to work.

The invitation to Pendle's MP (and other local people) to help at the shop was part of the UK Volunteers Week initiative.

Photo to follow.

For Immediate Release: 9 June 1993
99/93

COMPANY LAW "NEEDS A SHAKE UP" says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing for an urgent review of the law which, he claims, allows directors to walk away unscathed from their insolvent companies "leaving a trail of devastation and misery in their wake".

The MP says he has examples of companies that have gone under owing thousands of pounds to local traders yet, miraculously and mysteriously, the former directors continue to enjoy lavish lifestyles, untouched by the collapse of the firms they controlled.

Speaking at Westminster today, Prentice said: "I have a number of these wretched con men in my sights whose track record in folding up companies is truly awesome. I have one incredible case at the moment which features a trail of collapsed companies going back a decade. Yet the individual concerned is still living the life of Riley."

"I simply cannot understand how it is possible for these individuals to walk away from their creditors and materialise a few months later as directors of another company. There is a weak link in the legislation which obviously needs tightening up."

ends

Note to Editors: The Company Directors Disqualification Act (CDDA) 1986 identifies two main categories of conduct which render directors liable to disqualification. The first is general misconduct (eg fraud, persistent breaches of company law) and the second is unfitness (eg misapplication of funds, responsibility for transactions intended to defraud creditors and so on.)

For Immediate Release: 7 June 1993
100/93

PENDLE *ARTHRITIS CARE* GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, dropped into Saturday's ***Arthritis Care*** coffee morning (5 June) at the Byron Road Senior Citizens' Centre in Colne and hailed it a big success. The event attracted a steady stream of well-wishers and supporters throughout the morning.

The MP said: "There are now over sixty members of the Pendle Branch of Arthritis Care and the organisation is clearly going from strength to strength. It provides support and friendship for people suffering from this painful and potentially crippling condition. I am doing everything I can to ensure that the scientists and doctors are given all the help they need to find out why arthritis strikes and to come up with a cure."

ends

Note to Editors: Gordon Prentice MP is the President of the Pendle Branch of Arthritis Care.

Photo Caption: Gordon Prentice MP with Barbara Hill, Secretary of the local branch and other members.

For Immediate Release: 8 June 1993
101/93

MP SETS THE AIRWAVES BUZZING

West Craven has given the thumbs up to the campaign by local MP, Gordon Prentice, to get the area tuned into Granada TV and BBC North West. He claims a quarter of his constituents cannot receive vital local news but, instead, get programmes beamed in from the other side of the country.

Following last month's County Council elections, the MP complained that people in areas such as Barnoldswick (where he lives) and Earby "have more chance finding out what's happening at County Hall by reading the tea leaves in their tea cups than by turning on the TV."

Prentice said: "I am amazed at the response my campaign has generated. I am not only getting letters but petitions as well! People are telling me they are fed up hearing news about Lincoln and Scunthorpe and getting nothing at all about north east Lancashire. I don't want people to lose the programmes they are already getting from Leeds - but I do want them to have a choice."

The MP continued: "The Government typically has washed its hands of the matter. The Heritage Secretary, Peter Brooke MP, insists it is something for the broadcasters and they, in turn, say the installation of new transmitters must go to areas in the UK where people cannot receive any television at all. That's about 300,000 people. 99.4% of the UK population is able to receive both BBC and ITV programmes."

"The Independent Television Commission (who are responsible for TV coverage in the Pendle area) tell me they would consider proposals for new transmitters but someone else would have to come up with the cash. The Government should act positively and tell the BBC and independent TV companies to transmit programmes to every corner of their regional (in the case of the BBC) or franchise area (in the case of ITV). Everyone recognises there is a problem but it is like walking through treacle to get something moving.

Airwaves are buzzing

"I am now in touch with the ITC and Granada Television to find out exactly how much it would cost for the new transmitters and boosters which would allow places such as Barlick and Earby to pick up North West programmes. I'll be putting pressure on Ministers to co-operate with the TV people to get something done. I'll also be writing to the hundreds of local people who have been in touch with me with further details of the campaign and how they can help."

"In this day and age of electronic wizardry and sophisticated telecommunications, nothing is impossible" said the Pendle MP. "Beam me up Scotty!"

Note to Editors: The Independent Television Commission wrote to the Pendle MP in the following terms:

"The situation regarding the planning and building of new transmitters is as follows. There is an existing "relay programme" in which approximately 25 new low-power transmitters are built each year. The programme is carried out jointly by the BBC (who take responsibility for one half of the UK) and by National Transcommunications Ltd (who look after the other half under the policy guidance of the ITC). Your constituency is in an ITC/NTL area. The BBC's contribution is funded by themselves, while NTL's contribution is funded by an overhead included in the transmission charges paid to them by ITV, Channel 4 and S4C. In order to be included in this national programme, and to be funded in this way, the new relay transmitters must provide television to communities who currently do not receive any terrestrial television service at all. There are still around 300,000 people in the UK who find themselves in this position.

We are willing to consider proposals for new transmitters which duplicate television coverage and which would provide a choice of regional programme content but the costs would have to be met from funds other than those I have described above. A further issue to be addressed would be the technical one of identifying the necessary transmission frequencies for any new transmitter. These would have to be ones which neither caused interference to,

nor suffered interference from, any existing transmissions or future transmissions planned to serve any communities receiving no television at all in the vicinity.

For Immediate Release: 9 June 1993
102/93

PENDLE JOBLESS COSTS £26.7m A YEAR SAYS PRENTICE

Unemployment in Pendle is costing a staggering £26.7m a year according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The shock figures are based on the cost to the taxpayer of keeping someone unemployed for a year. The former Employment Secretary, Gillian Shepherd, told the Commons Employment Select Committee that every jobless person costs the country £9,000 in benefits paid out and tax not taken in. Nationwide, the figures show unemployment is costing a staggering £26.5 **billion** a year.

Prentice said: "Tory threats to levy prescription charges on pensioners and to charge people for going to hospital or to see their doctor are all part of the cost of mass unemployment. The Government has already broken its election promise and put VAT on gas and electricity to try to reduce Government borrowing. They aim to put up rents and the Council Tax. And they are trying to force firefighters and nurses to accept pay cuts."

"All this is part of the price everybody is having to pay for unemployment. This year it will cost the nation £26.5 billion to pay for unemployment. That's more than half the total planned Government borrowing of £50 billion. Here in Pendle this works out at £26.7 million. The figures take your breath away.

Note to Editors: Unemployment makes people ill both mentally and physically. Since unemployment started to take off in March 1990, the number of people receiving Sickness Benefit has risen by 230,000 to 538,000 (74%). The number on Invalidity Benefit has risen over the same period by 366,000 to 1,576,000 (30%). The cost of unemployment in Pendle is based on the April 1993 jobless figure of 2,972.

For Immediate Release: 9 June 1993
103/93

PENDLE MP TO VOTE AGAINST VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA BILL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to vote against the Voluntary Euthanasia Bill to be brought in today by Piara Khabra MP under the 10 minute rule procedure.

The MP said: "I can understand the motives of those such as Piara Khabra who wish to allow voluntary euthanasia. They are as concerned as the rest of us about people who are suffering and are in great pain. But legalising euthanasia is not the answer. It is, in fact, the thin end of a very fat wedge and I can envisage circumstances where frail, elderly people would wish to give their consent to euthanasia because they feel themselves to be a burden on their relatives."

"This is a slippery slope we mustn't go down."

For Immediate Release: 10 June 1993
104/93

PRENTICE SLAMS "SORDID AND SQUALID" TORY GIFT TO ASIL NADIR

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has launched a ferocious attack on Tory MPs, Michael Mates and Michael Heseltine, for their involvement with Asil Nadir, the disgraced former chairman of Polly Peck International and contributor to Tory Party funds, who jumped bail last month and is now in Cyprus.

The MP said: "Conservative double standards are simply nauseating. Here we have Michael Mates - a Government Minister - giving a watch to Nadir inscribed *"Don't let the buggers get you down".* The Prime Minister says this was a misjudgement and *"not a hanging offence".* But why were Mates and Heseltine making representations on behalf of Nadir in the first place? Nadir had no constituency connections with either."

"What about the creditors of Asil Nadir? People who lost millions. What advice has Michael Mates to offer them? The gift of a watch to a fugitive from British justice requires some sort of explanation from Mates but all we have heard so far is a deafening silence.

Note to Editors: Since 1991, the Pendle MP has been calling on the Conservative Party to hand back to the creditors of Polly Peck International the £1.5m given to the Party by Asil Nadir. He was made bankrupt in November 1991 owing personal creditors £90m. Last month, when Nadir fled to Cyprus, the Pendle MP said the Tories were "shameless". Asil Nadir's cash gift of £1.5m works out at £2,369 for every Constituency Conservative Association in Greal Britain. John Latsis, the Greek shipping tycoon, donated £2 million to thc Tories in 1991 - equal to £3,159 per constituency in Great Britain.

For Immediate Release: 23 June 1993
106/93

PENDLE MP RENEWS CALL FOR GOVERNMENT MINISTER TO BE SACKED

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his demand for Northern Ireland Minister, Michael Mates, to be sacked following the latest revelations in the Asil Nadir affair.

Mates was told by the Prime Minister last week that the gift of a watch to Nadir, the £3.5m bail jumper and fugitive from British justice, was an "error of judgement" but "not a hanging offence". The watch was inscribed with the legend *"Don't let the buggers get you down".* Mates told *The* Guardian yesterday "Why should I resign? I have done nothing wrong."

Speaking at Westminster following yesterday's debate on Tory Party finances the Pendle MP said: "We still don't know why Mates gave this bail jumper this watch. We don't know why seven Tory MPs tried to intercede with the Attorney General on behalf of Nadir. We don't know what was in the mind of

Mates when he issued a statement denying the gift of a car when it is now clear his estranged wife received the use of a Volvo from Nadir's PR agency. However, we do know that Peter Diamond - a close family friend and neighbour of Mates - who is now basking by the poolside of the Jasmine Court Hotel in Cyprus, piloted the plane that took Asil Nadir out of the country."

"Nadir swindled thousands of people out of millions of pounds and has fled from British justice. To hear a Minister of the Crown tell the world he has done nothing wrong in the face of all the evidence to the contrary is sickening. No-one resigns from this Government. They hang on like limpets until they are prised out of their offices."

Note to Editors: When the use of the Volvo was first alleged, Mates said: "I wish to categorically deny that anybody connected with me has received any such gift or that I have done anything in any way improper in this connection."

For Immediate Release: 22 June 1993
107/93

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHAKE UP "BIZARRE" says PRENTICE

Proposals to abolish North Yorkshire County Council and bolt together Craven and Harrogate District Councils have been dubbed "bizarre" by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The plans, released by the Government appointed Local Government Commission yesterday, propose the creation of a new structure based on enlarged districts. The proposals are open to public consultation and are subject to Parliamentary approval.

Prentice said: "This new local government map is absolutely unworkable. The new authorities will not be local and to suggest that people in Richmond and in Scarborough, in the new North Riding, have much in common is to invite ridicule. And to create a new monster council running from the edge of Pendle to Harrogate and beyond is simply unacceptable. If these proposals stand it augurs ill for the Commission's review of Lancashire which is due to begin in September. Our 14 district councils could disappear in a puff of smoke and be replaced by half a dozen mega councils."

For Immediate Release: 22 June 1993
108/93

PAROLE BOARD TODAY FOR ALEX

Anthony Alexandrowicz (Alex), the Nelson man jailed 22 years ago for a crime he says he never committed, is to face the Parole Board today at Littlehey Prison in Cambridgeshire. Under new rules, brought in by the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and operating since last October, the Board can order Alex's immediate release or bat the ball back to the Home Secretary and simply make a recommendation to him.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "We are all keeping our fingers crossed that, this time, Alex will be allowed to walk free. He is no danger to anyone. Neither to himself nor the public at large. To keep him in prison would be cruel beyond belief."

Note to Editors: The decision of the three person Parole Board will be known in a week's time. With discretionary lifers such as Alex the Home Secretary has to refer the case to the Parole Board every two years for fresh consideration. Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in prison for twenty two years for a crime which, he maintains, he did not commit. Alexandrowicz was born in Nelson in Lancashire. He had a difficult home life and he was taken into care at the age of 12 because of violence in the family. After he left Approved School he became a small time burglar. When he was 17, he allegedly broke into a house in Preston and stabbed the woman living there in the breast and stomach. She left the hospital the same day as she was admitted.

more follows

At the police station he made a confession - which he now says was made under duress. To this day, he maintains he is innocent. At the time, the psychiatric reports labelled him as someone prone to depression. However, he was not sent to a place where his condition could be treated but to an ordinary prison. He was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for wounding and aggravated burglary. He ended up in Parkhurst as a Category A prisoner. The experience brutalised him and he had a number of run ins with the prison authorities.

In 1988, three prison governors and two psychiatrists recommended to the Parole Board that he should be released. The Parole Board agreed and, in turn, reported to the Home Secretary who turned down the recommendation. The medical evidence confirmed that he was no danger to society.

The Granada TV programme advances one - very far fetched - theory in an attempt to explain the Home Office decision. Alexandrowicz is of Russian extraction. Although he knew his father had served with the Red Army he (Alexandrowicz) knew nothing of his grandparents. When Alexandrowicz was 16 he went to the Soviet Embassy to ask if they could help trace his long lost grandparents. When he was 21, Alexandrowicz applied for Soviet citizenship. The TV programme suggests that this found its way into Home Office files and prejudiced his chance of release from prison.

With all hope gone, he decided to escape from the open prison he was in. He contacted the TV people; gave them his story and then turned himself in. He is now back in prison - along with some 300 discretionary life prisoners who are now eligible for review under the new Criminal Justice Act 1991. The Home secretary told Prentice on 5 November 1992 "It is for the Parole Board to decide the order in which these cases are heard. To assist in this task, the Board is provided with a list of those eligible in each prison establishment... Mr Alexandrowicz will be notified as soon as his case is listed for hearing." His hearing is today, 22 June 1993.

For Immediate Release: 22 June 1993
109/93

SHOWDOWN WITH BR OVER EAST LANCS RAIL CRISIS

The crisis facing the East Lancashire railway line is top of the agenda in a high level meeting to be called next month to chart the way forward and save the area's railways. The meeting on 23 July will involve local MPs, British Rail, Lancashire County Council and the district councils.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I hope something positive will come out of this. The state of our local railway is an absolute disgrace. When I raised the issue in the Commons of the 20mph "puffing billy" that runs through my constituency I received a sneering reply from John Major's stand in, Tony Newton MP, the Leader of the House, who said the problems would be solved by privatisation. No-one believes this fairy tale that the private sector will ride to the rescue."

"We need to find out from BR how much it would cost to maintain the line to a proper standard and what level of investment is needed to ensure its long term viability. I want to know what the implications are of the cut back in track maintenance. I want details of passenger traffic and future projections and armed with this information I shall be seeking a meeting with the Secretary of State for Transport, John MacGregor. Thomas the Tank Engine would do a better job of running our railway system than the present Government."

Note to Editors: On 24 May the Government released details of the second tranche of lines to be put out to franchise. These included North West Regional Railways. BR is currently reorganising itself into the 25 separate shadow franchise areas which are intended to be up and running by April 1994. They will operate for at least six months during which time contracts will be negotiated (and put in place) with the private operators.

On 25 May, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told a packed House of Commons he wanted action to lift the 20mph speed limit for trains on the Nelson to Colne railway line.

Crisis meeting on East Lancs Railway

Prentice told the Commons that trains in his constituency were travelling 9 miles slower than the first ever passenger train in England. "In 1829, George Stephenson's Rocket achieved a speed of 29mph on its journey from Liverpool to Manchester. Now, 164 years later, my local trains are chugging along at a slower speed." Prentice showed MPs a letter from the Chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid, which made it clear the 20mph speed restriction was permanent unless more funding became available from the Government.

For Immediate Release: 23 June 1993
110/93

BANK CLOSURE "DEPLORABLE" says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has hit out at the decision of NatWest Bank to close its Brierfield Branch. The Bank told the MP there was no alternative because of "falling business volumes".

The MP lobbied NatWest following approaches from a number of disgruntled individual customers and companies. Prentice said: "NatWest admits that some customers will be inconvenienced but it says alternatives are available. In Burnley or in Nelson, yes, but what about the long suffering residents of Brierfield?"

"The closure of this Bank is symptomatic of what is happening all around us. Closures of Post Offices, threats to local pharmacies, closures of local Job Centres, closures of electricity and gas showrooms. This recession is leaving of trail of devastation in every shopping area in Pendle."

For Immediate Release: 24 June 1993
111/93

NORWEB PROFITS SPARK REACTION FROM PENDLE MP

Norweb, the Manchester based privatised electricity company, has announced pre-tax profits of £157.1m for the year March 92 - March 93 - up 14% on the previous year. The profits figures, released yesterday, came alongside news that dividends will increase by 13% to 20p per share.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Norweb is selling less electricity in the recession hit North West while at the same time increasing its profits and paying substantial dividends. It's no wonder they have been shamed into cutting electricity prices by 1.6% from 1 July. But even that reduction is far too modest given the swingeing increases in electricity prices over recent years."

"Even Norweb chairman, Kenneth Harvey, has expressed concern about the leap in dividends paid out by the privatised electricity companies - fearing charges of excessive profits may attract the interest and intervention of Offer - the electricity regulator."

Prentice continued: "Customers throughout the North West have been comprehensively ripped off ever since privatisation. We pay £43.36p a year in standing charges even before a single plug gets within striking distance of a socket. Even more of a scandal is the level of remuneration and perks for Norweb's top people. The accounts for last year show Kenneth Harvey's salary increased from £105,135 in 1991 to £184,643 in 1992 - a ballistic increase of £1,529 per week. Who knows what the 1993 accounts will reveal when they are published in five or six weeks time?"

"We also need to turn the spotlight on Norweb's share option scheme which could be worth a few hundred thousand pounds to Mr Harvey in seven months time. It gives the chairman a nice little profit of £266,393 on the shares he has options on."

more follows

Norweb Profits Up

Note to Editors: The 1992 full year profits came in at £138m, up 96% on the £70m full year profits for 1991.

The salary increases should be seen alongside the generous share options the Norweb Directors have awarded themselves. Kenneth Harvey has (at March 92) 157,629 share options (up from 108,080 share options at March 91) and three of his fellow executive directors have 80,187.

They can exercise their right to buy shares under the *Executive Share Option Scheme* for £3.11 between February 1994 and February 2001. If this scheme were operating today, the chairman of Norweb would make

£266,393 straight profit on shares bought at £3.11 per share and sold at today's price of £4.80.

Executive Directors of Norweb and their interests

	Shares at March 92	Options at March 92	Shares at March 92	Options at March 91
K.G. Harvey	5,357	157,629	5,357	108,080
A. Crowder	7,142	-	7,142	-
B. Benson	5,455	46,430	5,455	46,430
M.G. Faulkener	7,525	82,158	7,525	56,633
G.P. McTague	500	-	-	-
A. Simmons	3,567	80,187	3,567	54,662
B.J. Wilson	2,351	80,187	2,351	54,662

Source: Norweb Financial Review 91/92.

For Immediate Release: 29 June 1993
112/93

FREE AT LAST!

Anthony Alexandrowicz (Alex), the Nelson man jailed 22 years ago for a crime he says he never committed, is to be set free. He faced the Parole Board last Tuesday at Littlehey Prison in Cambridgeshire and news of the decision has just come through.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "This is marvellous news. A miilion thanks must go to all the people who have been working so hard for Alex's release - especially Kevin Fegan of the ***Free Alex Now*** campaign and his lawyer, Judi Kemish."

"Alex will now start the really difficult bit - rebuilding his life after almost a quarter of a century behind bars. We all wish him well in the future."

Note to Editors: Anthony Alexandrowicz has been in prison for twenty two years for a crime which, he maintains, he did not commit. Alexandrowicz was born in Nelson in Lancashire. He had a difficult home life and he was taken into care at the age of 12 because of violence in the family. After he left Approved School he became a small time burglar. When he was 17, he allegedly broke into a house in Preston and stabbed the woman living there in the breast and stomach. She left the hospital the same day as she was admitted.

At the police station he made a confession - which he now says was made under duress. To this day, he maintains he is innocent. At the time, the psychiatric reports labelled him as someone prone to depression. However, he was not sent to a place where his condition could be treated but to an ordinary prison. He was ordered to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for wounding and aggravated burglary. He ended up in Parkhurst as a Category

A prisoner. The experience brutalised him and he had a number of run ins with the prison authorities.

In 1988, three prison governors and two psychiatrists recommended to the Parole Board that he should be released. The Parole Board agreed and, in turn, reported to the Home Secretary who turned down the recommendation. The medical evidence confirmed that he was no danger to society.

The Granada TV programme advances one - very far fetched - theory in an attempt to explain the Home Office decision. Alexandrowicz is of Russian extraction. Although he knew his father had served with the Red Army he (Alexandrowicz) knew nothing of his grandparents. When Alexandrowicz was 16 he went to the Soviet Embassy to ask if they could help trace his long lost grandparents. When he was 21, Alexandrowicz applied for Soviet citizenship. The TV programme suggests that this found its way into Home Office files and prejudiced his chance of release from prison.

With all hope gone, he decided to escape from the open prison he was in. He contacted the TV people; gave them his story and then turned himself in. He was sent back to prison - joining the 300 discretionary life prisoners now eligible for review under the new Criminal Justice Act 1991. The Parole Board hearing was held on 22 June 1993 and his release confirmed today.

For Immediate Release: 29 June 1993
113/93

TV CAMPAIGN GETS A BOOST says MP

The campaign by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to get BBC North West and Granada TV beamed into the West Craven area of the constituency received a boost this week after figures were released by the Independent Television Commission showing the cost of the work.

The Chairman of the ITC, Sir George Russell, told the MP that the costs of getting the extra TV stations would depend on the technical solution which was adopted.

Prentice said: "Sir George has confirmed that any technical survey would be carried out by National Transcommunications Ltd and would cost less than £10,000. He went on to tell me the cheapest and most convenient technical solution *if it were feasible* would be to add further transmission equipment for the Northwest services to the existing transmitter site near Skipton. He said the transmission equipment costs for two additional services would be about £15,000 but if this were not feasible then one or two new relay transmission sites would be needed at a cost of about £40,000 each."

The MP said: "This is encouraging news. I shall be pressing for this technical survey to show what is - and is not - possible. The cost of getting North West TV beamed into the West Craven area is very modest given the thousands of people who would benefit."

The MP has complained about "a democratic deficit" in North East Lancashire. Just after the County Council elections in May, the MP claimed a quarter of his

constituents couldn't receive vital local news about the people they had just elected and that in areas such as Barnolswick and Earby "there was more chance of finding out what was happening at County Hall by reading the tea leaves than by switching on the TV.

For Immediate Release: 30 June 1993
114/93

PRENTICE SAVAGES WATER CHIEFS PAY AND PERKS HIKE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has waded into the furious row about North West Water chiefs "pay and perks" hike. He said at Westminster earlier today that the explosion in salaries and benefits was an absolute disgrace. The pay and perks package for now retired Chairman, Dennis Grove, increased by 43% over the past year from £186,000 to £267,000. The Chief Executive, Bob Thain, saw his remuneration package zoom up 37% from £207,000 to £284,000. In addition, Thain has 235,499 share options outstanding. North West Water shares were trading today at £4.72p. (See note below).

News of the ballooning pay and perks comes a month after North West Water reported increased profits for the year to 31 March 1993. Pre-tax profits for trhe privatised company were up 7% from £230m to £247.1m. Average price rises of 9% helped boost the profits bonanza.

"I intend to raise the issue on the floor of the House of Commons. How can the Government stand idly by and allow these grotesquely inflated salary increases at a time when they are asking ordinary mortals in the public sector to stick to increases between 0% and 1.5% and when they are abandoning the pay formula for firefighers which has kept the peace in the fire service for 14 years. It is simply not good enough to hear Ministers say they are concerned, North West Water customers demand action to stop this King's Ransom being paid to water chiefs."

"I shall be also be looking at the pension entitlements these people have negotiated for themselves."

ends

Note to Editors: The average household bill for unmetered water in the North West was £169 in April 1993 - up from £156 in April 1992. This was made up of a water

element of £79 (up 9% from £73) and sewerage £90 (up 8.4% from £83). In the North West, water charges sky-rocketed by 41% from 1989 to 1992.

On 29 May of last year North West Water Chief Executive, Bob Thain, told **The Times** that customers "were likely to face higher bills than anticipated after 1994 because of regulatory changes since privatisation." At the time the Pendle MP said: "North West Water should give its customers a break. We are bankrolling a luxurious lifestyle for its top directors while paying through the nose for ordinary tap water". North West Water was the only water and

sewerage company to resist calls from OFWAT, the water watchdog, to limit price increases in the current year (see Financial Times 26.11.92).

In November 1992, Prentice, accused Dennis Grove (then North West Water Chairman and the predecessor of Sir Desmond Pitcher) of having the cheek of the devil when he defended large pay increases given to the bosses of the privatised water companies.

On 30 November 1992, water chiefs were told by the then Environment Secretary, Michael Howard, (now Home Secretary) that they should set an example in pay restraint. Speaking at a Thames Water water treatment plant he said : "As you will allknow, our intention is that public sector pay rises next year should be in the range of 0% to 1.5%. I know that many people share my concern at the very large pay rises for senior management in the water industry over the past two years." Dennis Grove immediately hit back by telling the Financial Times "We have to pay the market rates to get and keep good people. These jobs are very demanding." At the time, the Pendle MP disclosed that Mr Grove had a share option scheme with NWW worth £260,000.

The executive share option scheme allows Directors and senior management to buy shares at an "option price" which can then be sold later at the then market price. The opportunity for making very large gians indeed is apparent. For example, one batch of 99,744 executive share options (out of a number) were issued in 1993 at an option price of 345.5p exercisable between 1997 and 2002. Today, NWW shares are trading at 472p. Fortunes can be made by buying at a favourable price and selling later at a much higher price. (See Table on pages 34 and 42 of the Annual Report).

1 July 1993

The Rt Hon John Major MP

Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1A 2AA

Dear Mr Major

You will recall that you wrote to me on the 5th April 1993 following an exchange between us at Prime Minister's Questions at which I raised the issue of the large salary increases for top management at Rolls Royce. In your letter to me you said that pay in the private sector was a matter for companies and their shareholders to decide and you also told me that companies were increasingly taking into account affordability and the performance of individuals in reaching their decisions. Is this the case with North West Water whose accounts have recently been published?

I am now writing to invite you to condemn unequivocally the enormous salary increases which have just been announced for members of the board of North West Water. You will have read that the now retired Chairman, Dennis Grove, received a 43% increase in his benefits package last year and the current Chief Executive, Bob Thian, received a 37% increase. At a time when you are asking

public sector workers to accept pay increases of 1.5% or less, these stratospheric increases can only be described as grotesque.

I have also been looking at the Executive Share Option Scheme at North West Water and it is perfectly clear to me that this scheme and others like it are nothing less than gold plated passports to instant riches. Information available to me suggests that the value of the Chief Executive's holding is currently just under £0.5 million.

In the circumstances, I know that many of my constituents will feel a positive response is required from the Government. Mere expressions of concern, along the lines you have expressed before, will not satisfy the outrage which people feel.

In view of the public concern about this matter, I am copying this letter to the Press.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice MP

For Immediate Release: 30 June 1993
115/93

CORRECTION: TO PRESS RELEASE 114/93 "PRENTICE SAVAGES WATER CHIEFS PAY AND PERKS HIKE"

The reference in the first paragraph to current chairman of North West Water Sir Desmond Pitcher is incorrect. The 43% pay and perks increase went to the former Chairman Dennis Grove who left the company at the end of the year. The first paragraph now reads:

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has waded into the furious row about North West Water chiefs "pay and perks" hike. He said at Westminster earlier today that the explosion in salaries and benefits was an absolute disgrace. The pay and perks package for now retired Chairman, Dennis Grove, increased by 43% over the past year from £186,000 to £267,000.

For Immediate Release: 30 June 1993
116/93

MP ATTACKS WATER CHIEFS SHARE OPTIONS SCHEME

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for a ban on Executive Share Option schemes following the disclosure that North West Water had boosted massively the "pay and perks" package of its board members. The accounts for the year to March 1993 showed the now retired Chairman, Dennis Grove, holding 94,450 Executive Share Options at 31 March 1993 and the Chief Executive, Bob Thain, holding 235,499 on the same date.

Calculations of the notional value of these holdings (see below) show Dennis Grove's block of shares worth £167,180 and Bob Thian £409,770.

Prentice said: "These Executive Share Options schemes are a "no risk" passport to instant wealth and should be banned. The boardroom of North West Water is an Aladdin's Cave of gold plated shares. The company is a ***privatised monopoly*** whose shares were bought from the Government at a heavily discounted price. Under the Executive Share Option scheme no money is paid over for the option and large profits can be made but nothing can be lost. The scheme encourages high dividends being paid out as these will shore up the share price. Directors holding thousands of Executive Share Options will obviously benefit."

"I have written to the Prime Minister calling on him to outlaw these lavish share schemes. Given the colossal increase in boardroom salaries in North West Water, these share options schemes are adding insult to injury. I don't want expressions of concern. I want action to stop this abuse of monopoly power."

ends

Note to Editors: The Executive Share Option Scheme is set out in the 1993 Annual report (note 22 on page 42) but it is not possible to quantify precisely the value of the share options of all the company directors.

more follows

MP calls for ban on Executive Share Options schemes

Share options are the right but not the obligation to buy ordinary shares at a fixed (option) price per share and can be exercised over a named period. For example, the 1,167,648 executive share options offered at an option price of 335p per share can be exercised between 1995 and 2002.

The precise value of share options held by individual directors could only be calculated if it were known (a) the number of options exercised, (b) the price at which each option was bought, (c) the price at which each share bought under the options was sold (to make a profit). Information in this form is not available.

However, some calculations have been made by Stanley William Hill, a water industry commentator, and the table below shows the share option holdings of Dennis Grove and Bob Thian at 31 March 1993, the average option price as calculated by Stanley William Hill and the margin between this and the market price of the shares as at 29 June 1993. The profit per share has been grossed up to give a "notional value".

Executive Share options at 31 March 93	Executive Share Options av take up price at 31.3.92	Discount from Market Price at 29 June 93	Notional value (a)

Chairman	94,450	295	177	£167,180
Chief Executive	235,499	298	174	£409,770

(a) Average figure for Chairman and five Executive Directors at NWW.

For Immediate Release: 1 July 1993
117/93

PENDLE MP HAILS HOUSING REPORT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has described the Lancashire Housing Inquiry report, published today, as the most comprehensive survey of the county's housing needs ever undertaken. The East Lancashire MP said the report underlined the gravity of the housing situation and no clearer evidence could be provided for an urgent programme of action underpinned by a massive injection of cash from central government.

Prentice said: "The Bishop of Burnley, the Rt Revd Ronald Milner, and the rest of his team, have done us all a tremendous service in pulling this vast compendium of information together and giving it such coherence. The decrepit state of much of Lancashire's housing is there, in the report, in black and white and it demands a considered reponse from the Housing Minister, Sir George Younger.

"In my own constituency of Pendle, we have the highest percentage in Lancashire of housing built before 1919 (65.3%). 4.9% of our dwellings are unfit (1,759) and a colossal 41.8% are fit but need renovation (14,922). The most recent figures show that Pendle Council was able to give 228 renovation grants at an average grant of £4,913 but these figures show the scale of the unmet need. Over £73m would be needed to bring Pendle's housing stock up to scratch - a Herculean task without backing and support from the Government.

ends

Note to Editors Extract from Lancashire Housing Inquiry findings:

1. Who owns what?

•Owner occupation in Lancashire has reached 76.5% compared to a figure of 66.4% for the UK as a whole.
•Under the policy of "Right to Buy", 27,000 tenants have purchased their council houses. This has led to a 27% reduction in houses available for rent and a 5% shift from Council housing to owner occupation.
•Council housing now represents only 13.4% of Lancashire's housing stock compared to a figure of 21.4% for the UK as a whole. On the west coast and in central Lancashire council housing provides lO% or less of total housing stock (Fylde 6%; Wyre 7%.
•Housing Associations provide just over 2.4% of Lancashire's houses. In 1993 they were building just 696 houses - not even enough to keep pace with losses due to "Right to Buy".

2. The condition of our homes

•Pre-l919 terraced housing provides 38.1% of the county's private sector stock compared to 29.3% for the UK as a whole.
•In Blackburn, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale over 50% of the private sector housing stock was built before 1919.
•9.5% of Lancashire's private housing is unfit by today's standards. A further 21.7% is fit but in need to renovation. Even assuming no further deterioration it would take at least 25 years at present investment levels to treat all these properties.
•Extrapolation of current clearance rates would produce a replacement cycle for Lancashire's housing stock of 1,000 years!
•Fewer houses are being dealt with under the House Renovation Grants system in place since 1989 although more 100% grants are given and more is spent on each grant: this has produced "spot" treatment of individual properties rather than allowing local authorities the freedom to target resources into areas of their own choosing.
•Lancashire authorities have responded positively to the need for renovation but they are all constrained by a cost ceiling of £13,000 per property under the Renewal Areas scheme.
•Changes introduced in the 1988 Housing Act have caused Housing Associations to reduce substantially their rehabilitation activities in favour of building new houses. Many associations would like to allocate a greater proportion of their resources to renovation but the current funding regime discourages this.

3. Homelessness

•The number of households presenting themselves to local authorities as homeless has doubled over the last three years, but the number accepted as homeless has remained relatively static: in 199l-92, 1O,OO9 households presented themselves as homeless but only 2,978 were accepted and rehoused.
•The problem of the non-statutory homeless in Lancashire, ie those who may well be homeless but who do not have a "priority need" according to legislation, is impossible to quantify. That there is a large and growing number, being dealt with by a variety of dedicated voluntary organisations with inadequate and erratic funding, is beyond question.

4. Property Values

•Property values in the west of the county are generany far higher than those in the east; districts in the west also are the ones with the lowest percentage of affordable rented housing. This combination of high prices and relatively greater scarcity of socially rented housing is also present in Chorley, South Ribble and Ribble Valley.
•By contrast, East Lancashire has some of the lowest priced housing in the country.
•The relative scarcity of socially rented housing and the cheapness of terraced housing in East Lancashire has forced many families into owner occupation "at the margins". As a consequence people stretch their resources to buy a small, older property but cannot afford the costs of maintenance or improvement. Unless at least two-thirds of renovation costs is grant-aided it is not a viable economic proposition to engage in house improvements.

5. Housing Needs

•There are 34,000 households on council housing waiting lists in Lancashire.
•Overcrowding is a major problem in Burnley, Blackburn, Hyndburln, Pendle and Preston.
•The needs of the elderly are a particular problem for housing authorities in the north and west of Lancashire which have high proportions of residents over retirement age.

For Immediate Release: 6 July1993
118/93

PENDLE MP FIRES ANOTHER BROADSIDE OVER PLANS FOR NAVY

Government plans to reduce the number of ships in the Royal Navy from 44 in 1990 to "about 35" have been blasted by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP quizzed Defence Minister Archie Hamilton MP (now returned to the backbenches) on 18 May about the number of ships and admirals in the Royal Navy. Hamilton claimed there were 59 major ships and 42 admirals.

"I said at the time there were more admirals than ships in the Navy and the latest defence estimates confirm the claim I made only two months ago. To be fair, Hamilton has difficulty with any calculation involving double figures but time would have remedied that. I can see the day when we - a maritime nation - will have a Royal Navy whose ships can be counted in single figures. Our merchant marine has disappeared over the horizon and our Navy is not far behind."

Prentice said: "This Government lectures the country about financial prudence yet it pours money down the drain faster than they can print the stuff. Four brand new diesel electric submarines costing £900m - the last one commissioned ten days ago - are to be sold off. Over £120m was spent on a new dry dock at Rosyth which is now no longer needed. There is just one gigantic, super expensive hole in the ground there. And to cap it all, the Government retains intact the £13 billion Trident nuclear submarine system despite the fact the warheads can't be tested because of President Clinton's ban on nuclear tests in Nevada. The biggest joke of all is that the Government can't and won't say where these untested warheads are targeted. The Senior Service would be better off with Popeye in command."

For Immediate Release: 6 July 1993
119/93

PENDLE MP PROMISES "EYEBALL TO EYEBALL" CONFRONTATION OVER CONTACT LENS CHARGES

A 70 year old Colne woman who needs new contact lenses every three months has been told she may have to pay over £73 a time to have them fitted according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP has vowed to confront Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley with details of this "scandalous state of affairs."

The woman, Dorothy Shanley of 117 Cleveland Street, Colne, has had an operation to remove cataracts from both eyes and needs contact lenses and

glasses to see at all. Without them she cannot see the fingers on her hands when her arms are outstretched.

"Mrs Shanley is extremely upset at the thought of having to fork out £292 a year for the contact lenses the doctors say she needs. She was told an operation could help but the doctors couldn't guarantee it would be 100% successful so the alternative are these contact lenses fitted every three months."

"When I met Mrs Shanley on Saturday I thought about what the Prime Minister told the Conservative Party Conference in October 1991: *"Let me say now, once and for all and without qualification, under this Government the NHS will continue to offer free treatment to everyone."* Well, if Mr Major knocked on Mrs Shanley's door and said the same thing today he would get a custard pie in his face. Or perhaps something worse!

"The NHS is dying from a thousand cuts" said Prentice.

Note to Editors: From 1 August 1993, Burnley NHS Trust will be charging £36.90p for each lens prescribed at the hospital eye clinic. The Department of Health directed the increase from £35.90p. These charges were introduced in the mid eighties going up from £26.50p per lens in 1989 to £36.90p this year. Help with the costs is available for people on income support which is the passport benefit to help with other costs. Those people just above income support lose out. Note: Mrs Shanley requested publicity.

For Immediate Release: 6 July 1993
120/93

PRENTICE PLEDGES "RELENTLESS INVESTIGATION" OF WATER CHIEFS PAY AND PERKS

"A relentless investigation" of the terms and conditions of employment of the directors of North West Water is promised by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Last week the Pendle MP together with other Labour MPs from North East Lancashire triggered a furious row over the 43% and 37% increases in the benefits package of outgoing chairman, Dennis Grove, and North West Water Chief Executive, Bob Thian.

"The salary increases are bad enough in themselves but when the Government is telling the firefighters and others in the public sector to take their 1.5% or less - like it or lump it - it becomes offensive. The details I released last week about the Executive Share Option Scheme add petrol to the flames. I have written to the Prime Minister calling on him to ban these gold plated schemes."

"The latest area demanding thorough investigation is the provision that has been made for the pensions of the water chiefs. Not only do they live in the lap of luxury when they are running our water company but they are floating off on retirement on extremely comfortable pensions. The accounts show that North West Water - that is the customers - has undertaken to pay the difference between "the relevant portion of (the directors') final salaries and the maximum amount payable under the rules of the Water Pension Scheme".

You can guarantee only the best pension will be good enough for the bosses of the privatised water companies" said Prentice.

ends

Note to Editors: The Water Pension Scheme is a "final salary" scheme where the level of pension benefits is related to an employee's final earnings and length of service. Since 1989, no limit has been put on the level of pension provision made by an employer for their employees.

North West Water Pensions

However, pension benefits that arise from earnings over a certain "earnings cap" (currently £75,000) do not attract tax relief on contributions or income accrued. The maximum pension that can be paid out of an approved scheme is set at two thirds of final salary.

Special provisions can allow companies to provide enhanced, tax approved benefits for its executives and directors. The directors can be members of the main occupational pension scheme and the scheme's trust deeds and rules can allow the trustees discretionary powers to increase or augment the benefits payable. An alternative is an "unapproved scheme" where the employer (ie the company) promises to meet pension costs above the "cap". Often these schemes are "unfunded" - that is, not based on a pool of contributions. Instead benefits are paid out of current company earnings. Any such payments will be taxed at the executive's top rate of tax when they are received. The difficulty is getting details other than those which must be set out by law in the company's accounts.

For Immediate Release: 6 July 1993
121/93

BBC NORTH WEST AND GRANADA FOR £6.25p claims Prentice

The campaign by local MP, Gordon Prentice, to get his West Craven constituents tuned into BBC North West and Granada received a further encouraging boost this week. At present, a quarter of his Pendle constituency receives signals from Yorkshire TV which rarely, if ever, covers local news.

Granada TV's Technical Director, Roger Pickles, told the MP "there should be no insurmountable technical reason why coverage could not be provided." Last week the Chairman of the Independent Television Commission, Sir George Russell, wrote to the MP with details of the technical work that would be needed together with a note on the likely costs.

Prentice commented: "The problem - insofar as it does exist - seems to be in finding the cash to get things moving. The Government have told me they are not interested and it is a matter for the broadcasters. The broadcasters say they don't have the money. But regardless of who says what, I am determined to break this log-jam somewhere.

"There are just over 34,000 households in Pendle and I estimate about 8,000 in the Barnoldswick/Earby area can't pick up North West stations. A survey would cost up to £10,000 and the technical work probably another £40,000

making £50,000 in total. This is the equivalent of £6.25p per household which I think is cheap at the price."

Note to editors: The MP has made it clear that people should have a choice of tuning into the North West or Yorkshire stations. One shouldn't be at the expense of the other he says.

Embargoed until: 14 July 1993
122/93

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES WITHIN THE NHS

Gordon Prentice MP for Pendle has welcomed the launch today of Labour's discussion document on Complementary Therapies which proposes making osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture and homoeopathy available free within the NHS.

It follows the publication of a major BMA report last month which acknowledged the massive increase in public use of complementary therapies - contradicting its 1986 report which dismissed them as "a passing fashion".

Dawn Primarolo MP Shadow Health Minister and author of the report said: "Labour recognizes the urgent need for reform - to provide statutory regulation of the main therapies and incorporate them within the NHS. Unfortunately at present the Government is failing to protect patients from untrained practitioners and failing to provide patients with a comprehensive free NHS."

Gordon Prentice MP added: "Complementary therapies have proven medical benefit and are cost effective, often avoiding the need for expensive drug treatment or surgery. 75% of GPs refer patients to complementary therapists and 75% of the public believe they should be available on the NHS. I am sure all types of local health practitioners and members of the public - especially women who are the main users of complementary therapy - will be interested. Their comments will be welcome."

Copies of the report are available free from Dawn Primarolo MP. Please write to her c/o House of Commons, London SWlA OAA and comments will be welcome until December 1st.

more follows

Complementary Therapies

Note to Editors:
Surveys show:
•80% of GPs want to have training in complementary therapies
•75% of GPs now refer patients to complementary therapists
•70% of GPs want the NHS to provide complementary therapies (as do 75% of the public, 70% of FHSAs and 65% of DHAs).

Up to **5% of the population** - the majority women - seek treatment from a complementary therapist each year but despite technical availability few receive it within the NHS: the main therapies need regulation and then incorporation into the NHS.

The Department of Health's lack of strategic policy endangers patients because anyone can set themselves up as for example an acupuncturist or herbalist; untrained practitioners act legally because the Government will not act to regularize the therapies.

Complementary therapies are cost effective, saving money by avoiding costly drug treatment or surgery; and, whilst Labour supports more research, the medical efficacy of the most popular and well established therapies is accepted.

Labour would make available within the NHS the complementary therapies of osteopathy, chiropractic, and acupuncture; their specialist benefit is recognized by public and professionals.

Homeopathy, already available at 5 NHS hospitals, should be made accessible to the general public (despite the complications of incorporating such a generalist service with a system where the GP is gatekeeper).

Labour would support (with publicity/resources) the present DoH policy which allows, where there is medical benefit, a GP to refer a patient for other complementary therapies eg herbalism.

More training should be made available for GPs including at medical school; and more training for nurses, who would have a large role in the delivery of other complementary therapies.

For Immediate Release: 13 July 1993
123/93

PENDLE MP BACKS SUNDAY TRADING REFORM

The law on Sunday trading is a "complete shambles" and must be speedily reformed says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was speaking at Westminster earlier today following publication of the Government's Green Paper setting out the options for the reform of Sunday trading.

"A quick flick through this document highlights the ludicrous anomalies in the law as it now stands. Milk and cream, including clotted cream, may be sold but not dried milk or tinned cream unless it is tinned clotted cream! And fish and chips may be sold at a take-away outlet other than a fish and chip shop but fish and chip shops may sell take-away food other than fish and chips! It's worthy of a scene from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.*

"These insane provisions encourage people to circumvent the law as in the celebrated recent case of the Garden Shop that sold a grape for £500 and threw in a garden shed for free.

"We need to bring the law into line with the realities of life in late 20th century Britain. I favour a change along the lines proposed by the Shopping Hours Reform Council which would allow all small convenience stores to open on Sundays and all larger shops to open also - but within specified hours, say 10am to 4pm. As far as I am concerned, the rights of shopworkers must be protected. I would not vote for any Bill which did not guarantee shopworkers the right to refuse to work on Sundays. There should also be guaranteed premium payments."

For Immediate Release: 13 July 1993
124/93

RAIL PRIVATISATION A DISASTER FOR PENDLE says Prentice

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, pledged today that he would be stepping up opposition to rail privatisation over the summer recess. "The 20mph puffing billy that runs through Pendle is a daily reminder of the absurdity of privatisation. Getting it up to speed means giving BR the tools to do the job, not not pretending the private sector has a magic wand."

Prentice said: "We now have a clear target, which is to prevent the Tories from reversing the major set-back which they suffered in the Lords this week. The Railways Bill is not coming back to the Commons until after the summer recess. By that time, I expect public hostility to rail privatisation to have reached even greater heights."

The MP added: "The Lords amendment would allow BR to compete for franchises. If the Tories believe in competition, why should they be opposed to that?

"Yet they call it an amendment which would wreck the Bill. In other words, they know that if would-be private franchisees are faced with opposition bv British Rail, they are likely to fail the test. Banning BR from bidding is a crude attempt to rig the market in favour of private operators, most of whom have never run a train in their lives."

ends

Note to Editors: British Rail is re-organising itself into 65 separate "companies", in advance of privatisation. In order to "shadow" the post privatisation structure imposed by the government, BR would divide itself by next April into :

- 26 train companies;
- Railtrack;
- 9 Railtrack zones;
- an infrastructure supply company;
- 15 infrastructure companies;
- 3 train leasing companies; and
- 10 commercial service groups

Each company will have its own managing director, its own hierarchy and - most important - its own lawyers.

Each company will be obliged to enter into contracts with the other in a network as complex as a Heath Robinson machine.

For Immediate Release: 13 July 1993
125/93

PENSIONERS SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE TO SAVE PENDLE'S POST OFFICES

One person in eight of Pendle's adult population of 65,000 has written to local MP, Gordon Prentice, or signed the petitions protesting about the Government's threat to local post offices. An enormous bundle of petitions containing 8,000 plus names are to be handed in by the MP to 10 Downing Street next week.

"Two months ago I reported a heavy postbag on this issue but I hadn't expected anything quite like this. People of all ages have signed but I know that pensioners are well represented. The Government's threat to stop benefit payments over Post Office counters in favour of direct payment into bank accounts has provoked a fierce reaction.

"People are outraged that our local sub post offices could face closure if the plan to transfer benefit payments to the banks gets the go-ahead. We will be keeping up the pressure until we get an unequivocal assurance from the Government that they will not touch our post offices."

For Immediate Release: 15 July 1993
127/93

PENDLE JOBLESS EDGES UP AGAIN

The jobless total in Pendle has edged up again breaking a five month trend of falling unemployment according to figures released today by the Department of Employment. 2,928 people were out of work and claiming benefit in June - up from 2,861 in May.

Nationwide, unemployment has fallen for five consecutive months and now stands at 2.9 million.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Since our exit from the ERM, the economic straightjacket the Tories forced the country into has been loosened and this must start to show through in the unemployment figures."

"I want to see a long run of figures which take unemployment down to - and below - the figure the Prime Minister inherited from his predecessor. In November 1990 there were 1,708 unemployed people in Pendle claiming benefit. Today's figure is over 1,200 higher. And that is despite all the fiddling and massaging that has gone on to keep the totals down."

For Immediate Release: 22 July 1993
128/93

LANCASHIRE TO BE CARVED OUT OF NEW ASSISTED AREAS MAP says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says the new assisted areas map - rumoured to be released tomorrow, Friday 23 July - will give the cold shoulder to Lancashire. The map was leaked to the press on 25 May and showed towns on the south coast of England such as the Home Secretary's constituency of Folkestone getting assisted area status.

The leaked document showed Pendle's bid for inclusion in the new map of "assisted areas" was knocked back. Other areas in Lancashire that lost out included Blackburn, Accrington and Rossendale.

Prentice said: "Government ministers are only prepared to say there will be a statement before the recess but Westminster is awash with rumours today that the announcement will be made tomorrow, Friday, when many members will have constituency engagements. If North East Lancashire has been carved out of the new map there will be justifiable anger throughout the entire area. No-one can convince me the problems we face here are less severe then those now afflicting Conservative constituencies on the South coast."

Note to Editors : The assisted areas map was last reviewed in 1984. The criteria used in the current review included unemployment levels; future demand for jobs in an area and the growth/decline in local industries; demographic changes; urban problems; distance from markets etc. Getting on the Assisted Areas map makes it more likely that an area will benefit from EC Regional Policy. Assisted areas qualify for special help through Regional Selective Assistance Grants and Regional Enterprise Grants - designed to help firms create or safeguard existing jobs and invest in new products.

For Immediate Release: 20 July 1993
129/93

PENDLE MP WARNS OF THREAT TO POLICE INDEPENDENCE

The independence of the police could be compromised as a result of Government plans to re-structure police forces and alter terms and conditions of police officers according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster following the publication of the Sheehy Report the MP said he had never known such deep unrest in the police service. I am getting serving police officers in Pendle telling me of their deep hostility to these proposals. "The police force has to respond to changing times. They can't be trapped in a Dixon of Dock Green time warp when the rest of society bears little resemblance to the Britain of the fifties. But these proposals are not just about updating and modernising the police service. Combined with the moves on structural reform, the Sheehy plans amount to an unprecedented attack on the integrity and independence of the police."

"Some changes are needed. There are too many ranks and we do need more flexibility in pay and conditions. I have no problem with the general principle of rewarding good service and not rewarding bad but we have to be clear about how "performance" is measured when many aspects of police work simply cannot be measured."

"The real threat comes from the way in which the Sheehy proposals combine with the White Paper on Police Reform. There is a dangerous combination of the Home Secretary appointing the Chairpersons of all Police Authorities, putting officers on short term contract (there will be obvious worries about reappointment) and having to achieve performance criteria set by the government."

more follows

Police Reform

"This is a move towards centralisation and political control of the police. The independence of the service is too important to be put in peril whatever administrative changes are required."

ends

Note to Editors: The **Sheehy Report** proposes: 10 year fixed term contracts, followed by five year contracts. Greater ability to remove officers for structural reasons. Currently officers may only be removed through disciplinary action. Severance pay to remove 5,000 middle mangers. Ranks of Chief Inspector, Chief Superintendent and Deputy Chief Constable should be abolished. Pay to be related to the scope of the role, the policing circumstances, the experience and skills required and performance. Currently pay is simply related to rank. Benchmark pay to be linked to the median private sector pay

The **White Paper on Police Reform** proposes: Police authorities to have fewer members, half appointed, chairperson appointed. Rest split between councillors and magistrates. Home Office control over police manpower and capital projects will cease. Decisions on how to spend money will be up to the Police authorities who will have responsibility for the performance of their force. The Home Secretary will hold them to account for performance. There will be National Standards and local performance measures. There will be a cash limited budget from central government and a local budget can also to be raised. Elected members to have casting vote on local budget if they all agree on amount. Simplified amalgamation procedures- getting rid of the public enquiry element.

The Labour Party believes the proposals contain the potential for an unacceptable shift of power towards the centre with too much power for the Home Secretary to influence local policing policies. Appointment of half the Police Authorities will lead to their politicisation. The need to clarify the *role* of Police Authorities, and make them more effective, should not be confused with the desire to change their internal *structure* and make them less accountable. Accountability is confused by mixing elected and non elected members since the body as a whole is accountable neither to the electorate or to the Minister.

Police Authorities should remain part of the local government structure, since their links with other local government services are crucial. No amalgamations should be considered until the Local Government Commission has reported.

Police Reform. The Facts:

General 1979-91 Number of police officers risen by 14%; total staff up 19% Total Spending up 67% in real terms
1992/3 total expenditure estimated at £5.65 billion, around £110 per head.
Crime risen 120%, Emergency calls increased by 70%, number of vehicles on the road increased by 38%; Arrests risen by 34%
Clear up rate fallen from 38% in 1981 to 26% in 1992
Primary clear ups stand at 20%
Overall clear up rates vary nationwide from 49% to 16%.

Force size
Cipfa figures show that the **costs per '000 population** for forces under 2,000 establishment is £84,153 and for forces with an establishment over 3,500 it is £105,061

The percentage of operational officers is 87.07% for forces under 2,000 establishment, 86.21 % in forces over 3,500 and 83.55% in the Met Police.

Clear up rates: forces under 2,000 average 35.19%, forces over 3,500 average 32.23% and for the Met it is 16.9%.

Unelected Quangos
Total spending by unelected bodies now stands at £42billion, greater than the total spending of local authorities.
Quangos now account for more than a fifth of public spending Of top 40 quango chairman now, none was a known Labour Party member; 12 of top 40 in 1978/79 were Labour supporters.
Two-thirds were businesspeople in 1992; one third in 1978/79 Only 2 women in top 40 now Of 22 whose schools could be identified, 18 went to public school *(Source FT 14 January 1993)*

Assaults
24,000 assaults in UK in 1991; 18,497 in England and Wales in 1992
1 assault for every 6.2 officers
190 person years lost due to assault related sickness
28.3% of Constables said they had been assaulted in last year
4.1% of Constables said they have been assaulted 5 or more times. 37.9% Constables threatened with assault in last year
7% threatened 5 or more times.

For Immediate Release: 20 July 1993
130/93

PRENTICE CONDEMNS COURT MOVE

Plans to merge Reedley and Burnley Magistrates Courts have been hammered by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP praised the stand taken by Barnoldswick magistrate, Colin Pollard, who has rounded on the proposals fearing they would lead to a worse service for West Craven. Under the new set up, cases are likely to be heard at Burnley with the Reedley courthouse used for administration.

"I have written to the Chief Executive of the Lancashire Courts Committee urging a re-think. The proposals will make justice inaccessible to many of my constituents. Magistrates, many already disaffected with other changes that

are being proposed, may quit the bench and rob the courts of valuable local knowledge and experience."

In a separate move, Prentice has responded to worries expressed by local magistrates in Pendle concerning Government plans to put new controls on magistrates' courts. "The Government wants Magistrates Clerks - the people who oil the machinery of justice - to be directly accountable to the Lord Chancellor. This proposal means in effect that the clerks will be under the direct control of an executive arm of Government. We need to make certain that money saving changes are not forced through at the expense of local justice and judicial independence. That is too high a price to pay."

Note to Editors:
The Government plans to create new management controls over magistrates' courts. The aim of the White Paper - A New Framework for Local Justice - is to "modernise the management structure and improve performance and accountability." Most magistrates have no legal training or qualification and therefore rely on their clerks, who are legally qualified, to advise them on points of law and to train them as magistrates. If clerks are made answerable, in effect, to the government of the day, magistrates will be robbed of the independence of their own legal advisers and therefore will lose their own independence. This in turn constitutes an infringement of the individual's right to a fair trial. A fair trial can only be one which has an entirely independent judge presiding over it. Magistrate's courts hear about 98% of all criminal cases and a number of other matters such as pub licensing.

The benefits of this restructuring are hoped to be an increase in the efficiency of the processing of cases in magistrates' courts. Once again, efficiency is being put before fairness and justice at a time when public confidence in the justice system and the courts is at an all time low in the wake of the recent exposures of major miscarriages of justice.

Alarmingly, these proposed changes which strive for greater cost efficiency, have yet to be fully costed. The proposals have caused disquiet among the great majority of branches of the Magistrates' Association. 15,000 magistrates (out of a total 29,500) have already expressed their support for a report prepared by the North East region of the Magistrates Association condemning the proposals.

The proposals envisage clerks being placed on fixed term contracts which subject them to performance appraisal in a job that requires, currently, that they exist solely to advise magistrates when they need guidance. They will also be required to meet MIS (Management Information Systems) targets on case through-put and "cash-limiting".

It is feared that while government may not seek to influence the decisions of magistrates' clerks directly, the effect of these proposals will be to force them to give advice and to make decisions for reasons other than the fair administration of justice. The effect of that will be felt by all individual cihzens.

For Immediate Release: 20 July 1993
131/93

PENDLE MP MARKS ANNIVERSARY OF *LAND TRAVEL* COLLAPSE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, claims justice has still to be done for the 40,000 people whose holiday dreams were shattered when the firm *Land Travel* collapsed a year ago. The MP said: "Not only did thousands of people - including some from Pendle - lose their holiday but they got no compensation whatsoever."

"I have been pressing for an independent inquiry into the Government's failure to investigate complaints against this company in 1991, and for compensation to be paid for this ministerial negligence."

"We are appealing against the Legal Aid Board's decision to refuse victims assistance with legal costs. Many were senior citizens and people on low incomes. And although the law was suppposed to be changed in January 1993 to protect holiday makers from a *Land Travel* type collapse, package holiday companies are still folding every week leaving people without any compensation."

"In 1991 the then Minister, Edward Leigh MP, failed to act when he knew the company was in deep financial trouble. Now in 1993 Michael Heseltine has failed to give consumers the protection demanded by the European Commission under the Package Travel Directive. *SFV Villa Holidays* went bust recently leaving 3,000 holiday makers without compensation because Michael Heseltine wrongly advised the company it did not have to hold bonding insurance to cover holiday cash it had taken in from customers. The whole thing is an absolute disgrace."

Note to Editors: Labour has introduced a Bill to ensure that all companies are licensed and bonded - ABTA, the Institute of Trading Standards and everyone in the trade backs the move. Prentice said: "This is the only way to tackle the cowboy holiday companies who are putting up to one million holiday makers (using non ABTA members) at risk this summer."

For Immediate Release: 19 July 1993
132/93

NORWEB CHIEF HAS £23,000 PAY HIKE

Kenneth Harvey, Chairman of the privatised electricity company, Norweb, saw his salary jump last year from £184,643 to £208,287 - an increase of £23,644. £20,00 of this was dubbed a "performance related bonus".

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who has called for action to limit large pay hikes in the privatised utilities, said: "I have told the Prime Minister to crack down on these inflated pay and perks deals. But all I get is the limp reply that it is not a matter for him but for the companies and their shareholders.

"At a time when the Government is about to make deep cuts in benefits, there is an unanswerable case for adding a higher tax band - above the current 40p in the £ top rate - to catch the super rich who have done so well out of the Conservative Government. The figures show the overwhelming majority of people in the North West would be totally untouched by the insertion of additional higher bands. However, I have no doubt the Tories would

mendaciously describe this as another "Labour Tax Bombshell" - just as they did at the General Election. But who on earth believes them now?

"In Lancashire, 94.6% of taxpayers (513,000 people) pay tax at the basic rate. Only 5.4% (or 29,000) pay at the higher rate of 40p in the £. We desperately need a taxation system that is fair."

Note to Editors: In the UK as a whole 92% pay at the basic rate (20,100,000) and 8% at the higher rate (1,750,000) Last month, Norweb announced pre-tax profits of £157.1m for the year March 92 - March 93 - up 14% on the previous year. The profits figures came alongside news that dividends will increase by 13% to 20p per share. Kenneth Harvey's salary increased from £105,135 in 1991 to £184,643 in 1992 - an increase of £1,529 per week. His salary now stands at £208,287.

For Immediate Release: 28 July 1993
133/93

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR PROBE INTO ACTIVITIES OF BARROWFORD BUILDER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has called on the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, to mount an investigation into the activities of Barrowford house builder and company director, Alexander Schultz. The Pendle MP's demand for action has been backed by his front bench colleague, Blackburn MP, Jack Straw.

The MPs put down an early day motion in the Commons earlier this week calling on Michael Heseltine to probe the business activities and track record of Mr Schultz to see whether he has breached the Companies Acts or the criminal law.

Prentice said: "I have had a stream of tradespeople come to see me about the activities of Alexander Schultz alleging they are owed thousands of pounds by this man. I have looked through bundles of documentation and heard the most distressing stories from constituents who had dealings with him and ended up losing a small fortune for work they did - but wasn't paid for. He just walked away from his debts. An urgent investigation into Alexander Schultz's business practices is required."

ends

Note to Editors: The following Early Day Motion appears in the Commons Order Paper of 28 July standing in the names of Mr Jack Straw MP and Mr Gordon Prentice MP

Mr Alexander Schultz

that this house, noting that Mr Alexander Schultz of 7 Apple Garth, Carr Hall, Barrowford, Nelson, Lancashire is shown in Companies House records as a director and/or shareholder of

BAFTONHURST LTD,
CHAINMASTER LTD,
DAWSON CONTRACTORS (WALLASEY) LTD,

BROADBRIGHT LTD
AND AMBERFINE LTD,

that each of these companies has been in serious financial difficulties, that some are now being wound up, and that for example the Auditors of the accounts of Baftonhurst Ltd reported on 9 June 1992 that the company had not maintained proper accounting records and that accordingly they had been unable to substantiate expenditure of £537,471.00 charged to the profit and loss account,

that the liquidator of Broadbright Ltd, Mr Wilson Henry, Chartered Accountant, has made serious accusations of fraud by Mr Schultz to the Department of Trade and Industry,

that a number of traders in East Lancashire claim that they are owed thousands of pounds by Mr Schultz and companies under his control, and that these persons include Mr Jack Livesey of 235 Skipton Road, Colne, Lancashire and Mr K P Hacking of 27 Arnside Crescent, Blackburn,

therefore calls upon the President of the Board of Trade to investigate Mr Schultz and the companies he has controlled, to ascertain whether there have been any breaches by him of the Companies Acts or the criminal law.

Background. Alexander Schultz has a history going back many years of unbusiness like practices. Our file has evidence from a number of people identifying Schultz's activities.

List of characters involved

•ALEXANDER SCHULTZ: Accused of defrauding various people.
•LINDSAY ASHWORTH Accomplice in some of Schultz's dealings.
•K.P. HACKING: From Heet engineering and Cosy Plumbing and Heating, one of Schultz's accusers.
•JACK LIVESEY: Of Pendle Kitchen and Tile Studio, one of Schultz's accusers.
•WILSON HENRY: A Chartered Accountant who has accused Schultz of unlawful practices. He prepared a report for the Department of Trade and Industry outlining his suspicions.

There appear to be three issues i) Wilson Henry's claims, these date from the mid 80s; ii) Livesey's case; iii) Hacking's case;

The first case involves the Chartered Accountant Wilson Henry. He has known of Schultz for a number of years and has been involved in one of his suspicious dealings. Henry has written a report to the DTI explaining his case.

The report cited that in the 1960s and 1970s Schultz had wound up companies with debts of a few thousand pounds.

The main part of Henry's evidence comes from the mid 1980s. Schultz and Lindsey Ashworth were both directors of the company Broadbright Ltd. It seemed strange to Henry that the company had carried out little work up to June 1985, however it had a huge list of liabilities, Henry suspected deception, Schultz and Ashworth have never offered an explanation.

Henry was employed by the two as the liquidator to the company (he had been working with a Mr G M Weisgard as a joint liquidator but Henry suspected that he was dishonest and refused to work with him in the liquidation) . Schultz and Ashworth asked Henry to speed up the investigation and in turn "sweep the insolvency under the carpet." Henry was concerned about this and subsequently a VAT investigation has revealed breaches of the rules and fraud. The VAT irregularities from early 1984 to June 1985 came to £31,862.49, at that time Ashworth paid £16,000 of the VAT at a time when he was claiming that they were broke.

Schultz and Ashworth employed Wilson Henry's company to investigate where their business had failed. Henry thought that Schultz and Ashworth would know exactly what had happened. An investigation revealed no trading had taken place between January and July 1985, there had only been the completion of one exercise and collection of money which went to the bank, however liabilities by June 1985 were £250,000. There were no delivery notes or records of where supplies had gone. Company accounts up to 1984 had been in a good state but they were chaotic by June 1985.

There were many claims made for the reasons for the company's economic problems, but not one fitted. On the 23rd December 1985 (i.e. just before Christmas so there was a low attendance) a creditors meeting was held, Weisgard and Henry were appointed to investigate the economic problems.

In November 1985 a list of creditors was produced, Schultz and Ashworth brought this to Henry. Against the name of each creditor was the sum which they were owed. No explanation was ever given for this.

Between the period from the end of 1984 to July 1985 the company carried out hardly any work but managed to run up huge debts. There is no evidence of any deliveries, although these must have taken place. Schultz could then have transferred the material to other companies or simply sold it at once and kept the money for Ashworth and himself.

Henry has also detailed a number of other cases but this is the most detailed case. Other less graphic descriptions can be found in Wilson Henry's letter dated 4 May 1993.

The second case is more difficult to grasp principally because the evidence is in many different forms and difficult to understand. Essentially it involves the manipulation of the limited liabilities law. It seems that Schultz and his business partners have a number of different companies, all naturally under different names.

The case of Jack Livesey. Jack Livesey runs Pendle Kitchen and Tile Studio. He too has been in contact with the DTI explaining his case and looking for assistance. Livesey's dealings with Schultz have been through Minster Homes, and two limited companies which Livesey claims he hides behind, Baftonhurst Ltd and Otto Properties Ltd. There was another company which was identified as being run by Schultz, Amberfine Ltd, but it was dissolved in early 1992. In a letter which Livesey wrote to companies house he complained about Schultz and the amount of money which was due to him.

Livesey had been contracted by Schultz to work on properties that he was building through one of his company's Otto Properties, Schultz would then sell

the houses through Baftonhurst Ltd and finance Otto Properties with the monies accrued from Baftonhurst.

Mr Livesey's company has carried out the work for Messrs Schultz and Ashworth's company, either under the names of Otto Properties Ltd/Minster Homes and Baftonhurst Ltd/Minster Homes. The sum which Mr Livesey states he is owed is £4929.27, this invoice was dated the 26 April 1993. Approximately half of this money is for the labour and the other half for the materials. Livesey has already been through the courts in a attempt to regain some of the money which he is owed. He lost the case and was ordered to pay costs, these amounted to nearly £5,000, when he went to court again on the 17 May 1993 he lost again, was ordered to pay £1,000 costs and was threatened with bankruptcy.

It was at this point that Mr Livesey met Mr Prentice and Mr Straw and asked for help. Pointing out Schultz's manipulation of the limited liabilities act. The claim about this act was that Mr Schultz would close down companies after he had transferred the assets to another company of his own. When creditors then came to collect their debts Schultz would say that he was only a director and that he had no responsibility to the people who were owed money because the law protected him. This tactic can be seen in the letter dated 13 April 1992 from Steele and Son to Farley's solicitors, "Mr Schultz Solicitors have filed a defence stating that he does not trade as Minster Homes and have, therefore, denied the debt." Pendle Kitchen and Tile Studio's invoice from the 24 April 1994 is addressed to Minster Homes and states how much he is owed. Furthermore there are faxes between Mr Schultz and Mr Hacking which have Mr Schultz's address on them and state that they are from Minster Homes.

This brief description has indicated the methods which Mr Schultz uses to defraud clients out of money. He uses all of the laws available to him to further his cause. Further documentation and investigation would be needed to ascertain the amount of money which he owes to people.

The case of Mr Hacking. Mr Hacking's case is similar to Mr Livesey's in that they are both owed substantial sums of money by Mr Schultz and one of his many different companies. Farleys solicitors have taken up Mr Hacking's case and some of the correspondence is in our possession. Mr Henry has also taken up the case and his letter can be found in the file.

This case is some what easier to understand, partly because there is less material and also because there are no legal documents from the courts.

Mr Hacking from 1989 did some work for Mr Schultz on a number of properties which he was developing. The company which Mr Schultz was working under at the time was Minster Homes. Within Mr Hacking's file there can be found a list of outstanding balances and the money which is owed. The total outstanding is £12,587.89. This total takes into account two cheques which Mr Hacking has received from Schultz.

The conclusion to this case is that Mr Hacking has never received the money from Mr Schultz who, it now transpires has now sold all of the properties for a total of £800,000 through Reeds Rains Estate Agents. Mr Hacking suspects that Mr Schultz may well leave the country with a string of debts and a very large bank balance. He hopes that an extensive DTI investigation will bring the man and his accomplices to justice.

For Immediate Release: 27 July 1993
134/93

MP DELIVERS PENDLE'S POST OFFICE PROTEST TO DOWNING STREET

Pendle's Post Office petition - containing the names and addresses of over 8,000 local people - was delivered to 10 Downing Street today (Tuesday 27 July) by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The petition was part of a nationwide protest backed by 298,970 people. Pendle's protest was one of the largest in the country and represented a big slice of the total for the North West region (51,772).

Prentice commented: "I am naturally delighted that the people of Pendle responded in such numbers. It shows the strength of feeling about this issue. It is about the right to collect pensions and other benefits at Post Offices but it is also a shot across the bows of a Government determined to privatise the Post Office."

The MP added: "This is a Government of spivs. Always on the look-out for ways to swindle an unsuspecting public. The next thing we must be on our guard against is a massive hike in the cost of postage when the present price freeze on 1st and 2nd class stamps ends in late August."

ends

Note to Editors: The petition amassed almost 300,000 signatures in six weeks. Many who signed the petition were concerned that their local Post Office could be forced out of business if people opted to collect their pensions and benefits through their bank. Rural post offices with only small numbers of payment transactions would lose some of the fees they earn - but other Post Offices were threatened too.

The Stamp Tax. It is likely that the Post Office will announce a big increase in the price of stamps over the summer as the present price freeze on 1st and 2nd class stamps ends in late August.

(more follows)

This is because the Government has increased the External Financing Limit (EFL) on the Post Office. The Post Office contributions to the Treasury have been increased from £68m in 1993/4 to £181m for 1994/5 - an increase of 250%. At a time of recession and low inflation, Post Office users should be entitled to price stability. A large increase in stamp prices is nothing other than a Stamp Tax - levied like VAT on heating and designed to bear most heavily on the least well off.

Note: Photo - under separate cover - shows Gordon Prentice MP outside No 10 with other Labour Members of Parliament.

For Immediate Release: 28 July 1993
135/93

PENDLE PENSIONERS "SWINDLED" BY TORY GOVERNMENT says PRENTICE

Pendle's pensioners were "swindled out of £13m" in the year from April 92 - 93 according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP calculates that Pendle's 16,300 pensioners lost £17.65 per week if they received a single person's pension and £28.00 per week for a married couple.

"In the year up to April 1993, single pensioners in my constituency should have received £71.80p per week instead of £54.15p. A married pensioner couple should have got £114.70p rather than the £86.70p they did receive. There is no trickery, sleight of hand or juju about these figures. I have done my sums based on information made available by the Secretary of State for Social Security himself."

"Earlier this year when launching his review of social security spending, Peter Lilley, said in the 1993 Mais lecture: *"The most important single spending decision in recent decades was the decision to link the basic retirement pension to prices rather than earnings."* He went on: *"To have retained the earnings link would have boosted spending by £8 billion per annum already and set it heading remorselessly upwards."*

"In simple language, this means the Tories have taken a calculated decision to hold down the level of pensions which are already amongst the lowest in the European Community. They are miserably inadequate. We have to be on our guard to ensure that pensions and other state benefits are not driven down further as the Government makes the people pay for its blunders."

"This is the Government that squanders billions of pounds of our money and then has the cheek to tell us we've got to tighten our belts to get us out of the hole they've dug for the nation. People will remember the £14 billion that went down the drain with the

more follows

Poll Tax. The £5 billion wasted in the ERM fiasco last September. And people will not forget the Prime Minister's unwillingness to condemn the exorbitant salary increases of top company directors over recent months - and his insistence that everyone else should accept 1.5% or less."

"This Government would sell their grannies to stay in power" said the MP.

Note to Editors: In 1980, The Conservative Government abolished the link between pensions and the rise in average earnings or prices, whichever was higher. (S1 of the Social Security Act 1980).

There are over 10,345,000 people over retirement age in Great Britain and, on Peter Lilley's own figures, they were £8 billion worse off last year than they would have been had the link not been abolished in 1980. The number of

people over retirement age in Pendle is close to the constituency average and the amount lost to them works out at £13m for that one year. They lose every year.

The pensioner population of Pendle is taken from the 1991 mid year estimates which uses up to date census figures. The national total of pensioners (and the constituency figures also) require some adjustment as there are people over retirement age who are still working. About 500,000 people over retirement age do not live in the UK.

For Immediate Release: 28 July 1993
136/93

SUSPECT KILLERS OF MOHAMMED AFZAL NAMED BY PAKISTAN POLICE

The alleged killers of Nelson driving instructor, Mohammed Afzal, have been disclosed by the Kharian Police in Pakistan after a nine month battle by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to force them to act. The MP passed the names of the alleged killers on to the Foreign Office on 14 October 1992.

A letter from the Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mark Lennox-Boyd MP, confirms the names of the alleged killers as Mohammed Hanip, son of Mohammed Saleen; Nadeem, son of Allah Rokha and Nazhar Iqbal, son of Noor Mohammed. The suspects have now gone to ground although the police are staking out their usual haunts.

The MP is now getting photographs of the suspects for publication in the local and Asian press in North East Lancashire in the hope this might generate new leads.

Prentice said: "The brutal slaying of my constituent - even if it happened in another country - cannot be forgotten until the killers are brought to justice. Mr Afzal's memory demands nothing less than this."

ends

Note to Editors: Last month, the Pendle MP asked the President of Pakistan to intervene personally to help track down the killers of Mohammed Afzal who was slain in Jaurah Village, Pakistan, on 4 October last year. His brother, Zafar Iqbal, was with him but survived the attack and is now back in Nelson. The MP told the President that eight months of steady and insistent pressure had produced no concrete results and he was now prepared to raise the whole issue on the floor of the House of Commons.

On 14 October 1992, Prentice passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister responsible at the Foreign Office. On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers of Mohammed

more follows

Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah

Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal returned to the UK and has now recovered from the ordeal. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

On 10 November Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps had been take to help the Pakistani authorities to apprehend the killers of Mohammed Afzal. The Minister (Mark Lennox Boyd MP) told the MP: "Mr Afzal was a dual British-Pakistani national, and the United Kingdom has no standing under international law to intervene in the investigation of his murder, which is being conducted by the Pakistani police. Our High Commission in Islamabad is, however, maintaining contact with the Pakistani authorities."

For Immediate Release: 28 July 1993
137/93

MAD COW DISEASE STILL A PROBLEM

327 new cases of mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE) were reported in the Lancashire herd in the two and a half month period from 1 May to 16 July according to figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Over the same period 6,748 suspected cases of BSE were reported in England to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Prentice commented: "It is in everyone's interest that this dreadful disease is eradicated as swiftly as possible and no-one gains anything from spreading unnecessary alarm. However, I am disappointed that the MAFF is not prepared to give firm projections on when we can expect the incidence of BSE to tail off. The figures for Lancashire and for England that I have released today are in line with earlier projections and follow the trend."

"The Government originally said there would be a very low incidence of BSE by 1996 and that it would disappear after 1996. They seem to have now backed off from that position. I think everyone would appreciate an indication of when we can expect to see the end of this scourge of the countryside."

ends

Note to Editors: The contaminated feed which caused BSE was banned in July 1988. The disease has a long incubation period.

For Immediate Release: 4 August 1993
138/93

PRIME MINISTER "A COMPLETE WASH OUT" says PRENTICE

The Government is ignoring the thousands of people in the North West who have been outraged by the explosion in the pay and perks of water chiefs, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP wrote to the Prime Minister on 30 June following the disclosure that the Chief Executive of North West Water had been awarded a 37% increase in pay and perks and Dennis Grove, the outgoing chairman, received a 43% increase.

Prentice said: "The Prime Minister passed the buck to Environment Minister, Lord Strathclyde - a peer few of us have ever heard of - who tells me the leaders of the utility companies should set an example and hold back their pay. Fat chance. This kind of limp criticism from the Government is water off a duck's back to people like Bob Thian and Dennis Grove. And his refusal to act on these gold plated Executive Share Option Schemes is absolutely disgraceful - but par for the course.

“The privatised utilities are monopolies with a licence to print money and it is now as plain as a pikestaff the Prime Minister and the Government are not going to do anything about it. They are a complete wash out."

Note to Editors: Following an exchange between the Pendle MP and John Major at Prime Minister's Questions on 18 March, the PM told Prentice in a letter dated 5 April: *"I have consistently made clear my view that pay should reflect affordability and the performance of individuals and the company concerned. The Government does not condone excessive pay increases at any level. Having, said that, however, pay in the private sector is a matter for companies and their shareholders to decide. I believe that they are increasingly taking points such as those I have mentioned into account in reaching their decisions."*

Environment Minister, Lord Strathclyde wrote to the Pendle MP on 26 July following a letter from Prentice to the PM on 30 June expressing concern about the level of increases in salaries awarded to the Directors of North West Water. The Minister said: *"The salaries of the chairmen of the privatised water companies are a matter for the companies and their shareholders. However, I recognise that the services the water industry provides have to be purchased by customers who may themselves be faced with pay restraint, or be on low fixed incomes. The Government has made it clear on a number of occasions that we believe Directors and senior management should show restraint in the rate of increases in their salaries. In particular we, their customers, are all entitled to look to the leaders of utility companies - even more so than managers and chairmen in general - to set an example by holding back their pay.*

You were also concerned about the executive share option scheme at North West Water. As I am sure you are aware, share option schemes offered to senior executives are common practice in industry and their availability depends on a company's performance over a number of years. The shares have to be paid for at the market rate prevailing at the time the option was offered and are only of value if the share price has risen over the period to the realisation of the option. Should a company perform badly the value of shares can also fall. Such schemes provide an incentive to executives to ensure that the company is successful."

The pay and perks package for now retired Chairman of North West Water, Dennis Grove, increased by 43% over the past year from £186,000 to £267,000. The Chief Executive, Bob Thian, saw his remuneration package zoom up 37% from £207,000 to £284,000. In addition, Thian has 235,499

share options outstanding. North West Water shares were trading on 30 June - when news of the pay hikes broke - at £4.72p. (See note below). Pre-tax profits for the privatised company were up 7% from £230m to £247.1m. Average price rises of 9% helped boost the profits bonanza.

On 29 May of last year North West Water Chief Executive, Bob Thian, told **The Times** that customers "were likely to face higher bills than anticipated after 1994 because of regulatory changes since privatisation." At the time the Pendle MP said: "North West Water should give its customers a break. We are bankrolling a luxurious lifestyle for its top directors while paying through the nose for ordinary tap water". North West Water was the only water and sewerage company to resist calls from OFWAT, the water watchdog, to limit price increases in the current year (see Financial Times 26.11.92).

On 30 November 1992, water chiefs were told by the then Environment Secretary, Michael Howard, (now Home Secretary) that they should set an example in pay restraint. Speaking at a Thames Water water treatment plant he said : "As you will all know, our intention is that public sector pay rises next year should be in the range of 0% to 1.5%. I know that many people share my concern at the very large pay rises for senior management in the water industry over the past two years." Dennis Grove immediately hit back by telling the Financial Times "We have to pay the market rates to get and keep good people. These jobs are very demanding." At the time, the Pendle MP disclosed that Mr Grove had a share option scheme with NWW worth £260,000.

The executive share option scheme allows Directors and senior management to buy shares at an "option price" which can then be sold later at the then market price. The opportunity for making very large gains indeed is apparent. For example, one batch of 99,744 executive share options (out of a number) were issued in 1993 at an option price of 345.5p exercisable between 1997 and 2002. On 30 June, NWW shares are trading at 472p. Fortunes can be made by buying at a favourable price and selling later at a much higher price. (See Table on pages 34 and 42 of the Annual Report).

Norweb Chairman, Kenneth Harvey, saw his salary increase from £105,135 in 1991 to £184,643 in 1992 - an increase of £1,529 per week. His salary now stands at £208,287.

For Immediate Release: 4 August 1993
139/93

MP RAPS HEALTH CHIEFS FOR MIX UP OVER CONTACT LENS CHARGES

The annual £292 bill for contact lenses faced by Colne pensioner, Dorothy Shanley, may be waived if her condition is diagnosed as a "technical non tolerance" case according to Health Minister, John Bowis MP.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, was outraged when he learnt his pensioner constituent - who is blind without her contact lenses and glasses - had been told by Burnley Health Care Trust that she should be prepared to pay for her lenses the next time she visited the eye clinic at Burnley General. The furious MP contacted the Department of Health for an explanation.

Health Minister, John Bowis, has now told Prentice the letter Mrs Shanley received from Burnley General Hospital - which triggered the row - misrepresented the true position. He told the Pendle MP that charges had long been made for lenses but Burnley General had not charged for lenses prescribed through the Hospital Eye Clinic.

Prentice commented: "Although I have this letter from the Department of Health I have yet to hear from Burnley Health Care Trust. Fortunately, it does appear that Mrs Shanley may be entitled to free lenses but I await confirmation from the hospital. If Mrs Shanley manages to jump through the hoop no-one will be more delighted than me.

"But what about all the other people who may not qualify for free lenses - because their incomes are just above the threshold where help becomes available? What about the dreadful anxiety the letter from the Eye Clinic caused many elderly patients? And what is to happen to all the people who received free contact lenses in the past when, apparently, they should have been charged for them? Are they now going to be asked to stump up the cash?"

"What a sorry tale of confusion." (more follows)

MP RAPS HEALTH CHIEFS

Note to editors:
Mrs Dorothy Shanley, who needs new contact lenses every three months was told by Burnley Health Care Trust in June she would possibly have to pay over £73 a time to have them fitted. Mrs Shanley of 117 Cleveland Street, Colne, has had an operation to remove cataracts from both eyes and needs contact lenses and glasses to see at all. Without them she cannot see the fingers on her hands when her arms are outstretched. She was told an operation could help but the doctors couldn't guarantee it would be 100% successful. Understandably, she opted for the alternative of contact lenses fitted every three months.

Extracts from the letter of 29 July 1993 from Health Minister, John Bowis MP, to local MP, Gordon Prentice:

> *"The letter* (from Burnley Health Care Trust to Mrs Shanley and other patients) *suggests that new changes for contact lenses come into effect from 1 August. This is not an accurate representation of the position. The most recent general guidance on the Hospital Eye Service (HES) was issued in 1989 and charges for contact lenses were being made long before that...*
>
> *"The position in Burnley arose from a local misinterpretation of the guidelines. I understand that previously, on the erroneous advice from a local consultant opthalmologist, no charges were made for contact lenses prescribed through the HES. Although this error was corrected after being drawn to the attention of the Chairman of the Burnley Trust, the position was further confused by the rather unclear letter issued by the Trust to their contact lens clinic patients. This is the letter received by Mrs Shanley. Officials from this Department have now contacted the Trust Chairman once more, asking that corrected advice be given to patients.*

"Turning specifically to Mrs Shanley and the charges for her lenses, it would appear the her condition is what is described as a "technical non-tolerance" case. Simply, this refers to patients whose eye conditions are altering progressively and who therefore require frequent changes of lenses. Such patients need only pay for the first pair of lenses prescribed. Details of these arrangements are given in the 1989 guidance referred to above. Her consultant will be able confirm whether or not she falls into this category.

For Immediate Release: 5 August 1993
140/93

PRENTICE BACKS FARMWORKERS' FIGHT AGAINST LOW PAY

Lancashire's 7,800 farmworkers have the backing of Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, in their battle for decent wages. The farmworkers are fighting to keep the Agricultural Wages Board which is threatened with abolition.

Last month, the Government issued a consultation document on the future of the Board. (Comments are invited by 1 September.) The paper makes it clear that abolition is an option, even though this will require the UK to set aside two conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice said: "The Government says minimum wages distort the labour market and more flexibility is needed. However, this "flexibility" can easily mean men and women being hired and fired with no regard to employee rights and with wages and conditions as poor as the employer can get away with. Taking an average of the two accepted low pay thresholds, 43% of full time men and 68% of full time women agricultural workers are low paid."

Note to Editors:

In September 1991 there were 4,600 men and 1,200 women employed full time in agriculture, forestry and fishing. A further 1,100 wmen were employed part time.

The Rural, Agricultural and Allied Workers section of the TGWU has issued the following briefing:

Low pay continues to be a major disgrace to the farming industry. The accepted thresholds for "low pay" are based on the independent Low Pay Unit and the Council of Europe. Taking an average of the two, 43% of full-time men and 68% of all full-time women workers earn less than the threshold. For both groups the percentage has worsened since 1987. Apart from demonstrating the low level wages paid in the industry, the figures for women imply that the equal wage legislation is still ineffectual in agriculture.

more follows

Farmworkers earn only 76 per cent of the average Industrial rate; they suffer a loss of over £76 per week compared with workers in manufacturing, and £85 compared with workers in production industries; and the lowest paid earned 16 per cent less than the equivalent in any other industrial group. Ironically, farmworkers work 2.8 hours longer each week, for the privilege of earning less than other workers. Average hourly pay excluding overtime (but including all bonuses) is only 70 per cent of the Industrial average. The abolition of the Agricultural Wages Boards would mean:

•The thirteen weeks full sick pay and twenty six weeks for those with over ten years service would disappear.

•The right to time and a quarter for the 21 days annual holiday would disappear. The right to be paid at all for holidays would disappear, the right to take annual holidays would disappear.

•The right to have paid public holidays including Christmas would disappear

•The right to appointment grade (supervisory) rates of pay would disappear

•The right to have a craft premium would disappear

•The right for time and a half for overtime would disappear

•The right to a 39 hour 5 day basic working week would disappear

•The right to be paid a minimum wage would disappear

•The right to be paid at all would disappear

•The pay gap between men and women would widen

•The £1.50 (in return for poverty wages) limit on the rent of tied cottages would disappear and rents of £50 - £60 per week may well be the norm

The argument that the "market" will allow workers and employers to negotiate wages and conditions free from statutory wage controls cannot realistically be applied when 42% of the workforce lives in houses owned by their employer. The reality is that wages will fall significantly under such conditions if the Board is abolished. The rents of the workers in "tied cottages" will rise enormously once the limits on rents detailed in the AWB Order are removed.

Abolition would only lead to destructive wage-cutting wars between employers. It would spark a vicious cycle of pay cuts, less investment in training, declining standards and threats to safety and hygiene.

For Immediate Release: 24 August 1993
141/93

PENDLE JOBLESS HITS 12 MONTH HIGH

The Pendle jobless total for July is the highest for a year and the third highest monthly total since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990.

Figures released by local MP, Gordon Prentice, show the number of people out of work and claiming benefit last month at 3,234 was getting close to double the number of Pendle jobless when John Major got the keys to Number 10. The figure then was 1,708.

Prentice commented: "I was hoping for signs of a long term decline in unemployment after all the ballyhoo we've had from the Government. The latest figures are bad news.

"Despite the latest official "adjustment" to the unemployment figures in April 93, the trend is again upwards. Vacancies at the Job Centres at Colne and Nelson are down - making it doubly hard for the unemployed to get back into work."

For Immediate Release: 24 August 1993
143/93

PRENTICE WARNS OF "LOST GENERATION"

"Job prospects for school leavers are grim and there is a real danger they will become a lost generation" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP's comments were prompted by a new Labour Party survey on youth unemployment which shows a quarter of 18 year olds in the North West are unemployed and 17% of 16 and 17 year olds.

"This survey shows that last Summer, when unemployment was lower than it is now, nearly 200,000 young people aged 16 and 17 were out of work. The latest figures show 125,000 still without a job. So the job prospects for this Summer's school leavers are grim.

"Here in the North West they will join the 27,000 young people aged 16-18 (20 per cent) who are out of work. *This is the second highest rate in the whole of Britain. One quarter of 18 year olds are out of work - the worst record in the whole country.*

"This isn't just bad for the young people and their parents. Poor job prospects make it hard for teachers to maintain discipline in school. Not having a job is no excuse for crime, but everyone knows that having lots of youths out of work leads to more theft and violence and vandalism.

"Unless the Government acts now to create jobs for young people, there is a real danger they could become a lost generation - alienated and sullen. They could be the first generation this century to be worse off than their parents."

more follows

Note for Editors:

SCHOOL LEAVERS AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Last Winter only 12 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds had a full-time job. So the job prospects of this year's school leavers are grim. Last summer when unemployment was much lower than it is now 196,000 young people aged 16 and 17 were out of work. And 125,000 of them are still out of work.

None of this information can be found in the monthly official unemployment figures but is drawn from the official Labour Force Survey and some studies of school leavers carried out for the Department of Employment.

THE OVERALL POSITION:

The total number of school leavers is at a record 20 year low. This year the Government estimate the total number of school leavers to be 626,000, a fall of nearly a quarter of a million compared with the 1980/81 total of 876,000. Of these 395,000 are expected to be available to enter the labour market compared with 635,000 in 1980/81.

School leavers available to enter the labour market

	1980-81	1985-86	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-91
Total	635,000	587,000	433,000	414,000	395,000	387,000

Source: Employment Gazette October 1991

Such is the fall in numbers of young people that in the mid 1980s there was talk of a potential shortage of workers. The fall should have made it possible to focus high-quality training and education on the smaller number of young people, both giving them something to do and making them better equipped to get jobs. Instead, tens of thousands are out of work.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT:

The monthly unemployment statistics grossly under-record the number of young people out of work. People get on the unemployment register if they are out of work and successfully claiming benefit. 16 and 17 year olds are disbarred from obtaining benefit (except in the most unusual circumstances). They are therefore excluded from the monthly unemployment figures.

However, the Government also carries out the quarterly Labour Force Survey which measures unemployment on the internationally recognised International Labour Organisation (ILO) basis. This includes 16 and 17 year olds. Last Summer this survey showed 196,000 young people aged 16 and 17 out of work. This gave an unemployment rate of 21 per cent for 16-19 year olds. At this time, the overall unemployment total was 200,000 lower than it is now. The latest figures for 16 and 17 year olds from the Labour Force Survey show 125,000 of them still out of work - a rate of 19 per cent. The same survey showed just 12 per cent (one in eight) had got a full-time job.

These figures are also borne out by a survey of school leavers called the Youth Cohort Study, carried out for the Department of Employment. This study is

also bedeviled by the fact that the figure for the unemployed does not follow the ILO definition. The most startling figures revealed by the Youth Cohort Study are that the number of school leavers getting a full-time job has fallen from 29 per cent in 1985 to just 13 per cent in 1992. Another major shift is an increase from 37 per cent to 66 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds in full-time education.

The figures for 18 year olds and above suggests this trend towards spending more time in full-time education may simply postpone the evil day. Even the official monthly unemployment figures show a massive rise in unemployment for 18-19 year olds and 20-24 year olds. The unemployment rate for 18-19 year olds has nearly doubled from 9.8 per cent in April 1990 to 18.1 per cent this April. Over the same period, the unemployment rate for 20-24 year olds has shot up from 8.9 per cent to 16.2 per cent.

GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES:

Information on geographical differences is very difficult to come by, partly because the Labour Force Survey does not record separate figures for any geographical area with fewer
than 10,000 people out of work in each age group. Table 1 gives what figures that are available from the most recent survey.

All the unemployment rates for young people are far higher than the overall rate. The most remarkable figure is an unemployment rate of 29 per cent for 16 and 17 year olds in Greater London, 25 per cent of 18 year olds in the North West and 24 per cent for 18 year olds in the South West.

YOUTH TRAINING:

The 1988 Social Security Act took away the right of 16 and 17 year olds to claim benefit on the grounds that they would get a place on youth training. This was called the Youth Training Guarantee. Despite this, the number of participants on YT has fallen from 390,000 in January 1989 to 254,000 in January 1993. Young people have 'voted with their feet' against YT. The latest official figures show why. 48 per cent of YT leavers left before their course was completed. Only 35 per cent gained a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) from their course. Only 50 per cent went on to get a job and 23 per cent ended up unemployed.

Despite the low take up, a Labour Party survey last Summer showed 75,000 young people waiting for the YT place they had been guaranteed. The Government was forced to admit that 19,000 were still waiting in December.

For Immediate Release: 26 August 1993
144/93

PENDLE PENSIONERS TO PAY FOR TORY MISTAKES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has released new figures showing that the Government are going to make pensioners pay for their economic mismanagement by not properly compensating them for the imposition of VAT on fuel.

The MP said : "Over the last fourteen years the Government has mismanaged the economy and wasted millions of pounds. Mass unemployment is costing taxpayers £25 billion a year. The Government's official figures put the cost of unemployment at £9,000 per person per year. For Pendle, this works out at £32m - the cost of financing our unemployment since the election.

"The Government threw away billions of pounds to City speculators last September in their vain effort to keep the pound in the ERM. Now they have imposed VAT on fuel to try to make up for what they have wasted."

"The Tories have made vague promises about compensating pensioners and families who will be hard hit by VAT on fuel. But they haven't promised to make up in full the extra cost of VAT - and what compensation they do provide above annual upratings in pensions and benefits is likely to go only to people on means-tested benefits."

"Here in Pendle there are 16,260 pensioners who will have to pay VAT on fuel but fewer than half of them - 47 per cent are on means-tested benefits. The other 8,620 are likely to get no extra help at all. The whole business is absolutely scandalous."

For Immediate Release: 24 August 1993
145/93

MP SEES NEW VAT THREAT LOOMING

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has warned of new Government proposals to extend VAT to food, public transport, children's clothes, newspapers and books. This year's Budget provoked a political storm when the Chancellor - with the backing of the Prime Minister - extended VAT to gas and electricity.

Prentice said: "Not content with breaking his promise not to extend VAT at all, John Major's Government is now considering extending VAT to food, public transport, children's clothes, books and newspapers. If they can break their promise on one thing, they can break their promises on the lot. And the new Chancellor Kenneth Clarke has said he will not rule out further extensions of VAT.

"If the Government goes ahead and slaps the top rate of VAT on food and other exempt items, it will put £11 on the weekly shopping bill of a family of four. Their food bill alone would go up by £8 a week.

"This is simply unacceptable when directors of privatised companies are lining their pockets at the customer's expense and the super rich are still benefiting from tax cuts. The Tories simply cannot be trusted not to break even their most solemn promises to the electorate."

ends

Note to Editors:

VAT. Despite its overwhelming unpopularity, the Tories have said that they will not back down on the extension of VAT to gas and electricity. After the Christchurch by-election, John Major said -

"I am not going to reconsider the policy of VAT on fuel"

EXTENDING VAT TO OTHER ESSENTIALS: However, this threat may go the way of John Major's Election promise:

"We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT"

For there have been rumours that the Government is considering limiting the rate of *VAT* on gas and electricity to 8 per cent. Instead, they are said to be considering extending *VAT* to all the other exempt categories. On 17 July, Kenneth Clarke said:

"I have always thought it anomalous that we have such a narrow *VAT* base in this country and have frequently said so. I am keeping my options open for tax".

THE COST OF EXTENDING VAT: If the Government did remove the existing exemptions from food, public transport, children's clothing, books and newspapers, the average shopping bill for a family of four would go up by £11 a week if the rate was 17.5 per cent and £6 a week if the rate was 8 per cent. At the upper rate •the average family with two children would be £600 a year worse off •their food bill would rise by more than £8 a week.

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS: The Liberal Democrats are trying to make the running on VAT. The fact is they went into the last General Election with a commitment to end "the anomalous zero rate of VAT on fuel".

The table below shows what would happen to a typical shopping bill.

The Tories' New Weekly Shopping Basket

	Existing Price	8% VAT	17.5% VAT
Bread, Flour	£2.57	£2.78	£3.02
Biscuits, Cakes	£3.42	£3.69	£4.02
Breakfast Cereals	£1.81	£1.95	£2.13
Meat, Fish	£11.59	£12.52	£13.62
Butter Marg	.60	.65	.71
Cooking Fat	.53	.56	.61
Fresh Milk	£2.49	£2.69	£2.93
Milk Products	£3.03	£3.27	£3.56
Cheese	£1.44	£1.56	£1.69
Eggs	.57	.62	.67
Vegetables	£6.18	£6.67	£7.26
Fruit	£3.52	£3.80	£4.14
Sugar	.32	.35	.38
Jam, Spreads	.22	.24	.26
Tea. Coffee	£1.23	£1.33	£1.44
Cocoa etc	.13	.14	.15
Other Food	£6.91	£7.46	£8.12
Rail & Bus Fares	£2.21	£2.39	£2.60
Other Fares	£2.62	£2.83	£3.08
Books, newspapers	£4.03	£4.35	£4.73

Children's Clothing	£6.65	£7.18	£7.81
Children's Footwear	£2.11	£2.28	£2.48
TOTAL	**£64.18**	**£69.31**	**£75.41**

For Immediate Release: 2 September 1993
146/93

MP WARNS OF "MILK SNATCHING" THREAT TO PENDLE SCHOOLS

Moves by the European Community to make deep cuts in the subsidised school milk scheme have been bitterly attacked by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The subsidy which covers half the cost of the milk is paid out of the £31billion EC agriculture budget.

Prentice said: "It would be an absolute disgrace if the subsidy on school milk were to be cut by 50% - as the EC Commission now propose. Milk is an important part of a healthy diet for children and the rise in the number of households in North East Lancashire below the poverty line in recent years makes the provision of subsidised school milk more important than ever. I want the Government to fight our corner on this one although their record on school milk gives me little encouragement.

The EC subsidy on school milk was introduced to reduce the ever growing milk lake in the European Community. The Government's intervention stores hold enormous amounts of surplus butter and skim milk powder and - with this latest lunatic decision - yet more milk and dairy products will go into intervention at huge cost to the EC taxpayer. To spend public money in this way rather than giving milk to school children is a misuse of public money. Cutting the level of subsidy for milk will force local authorities to put up the price of milk for school children, purchase less, or make up the difference by cutting another part of the budget. What an absurd state of affairs."

Note to Editors: Lancashire provides milk for 5 - 7 year olds and for children at all special schools at a cost to the student of £1 per term. Children whose parents are on income support receive free milk.

The Conservative Government's 1971 Education Milk Act restricted free school milk to 5-8 year olds and those over 7 in special schools or where there were medical reasons for continuing free milk. Margaret Thatcher was Education Secretary at the time. Children whose parents were on income support (previously supplementary benefit) were also entitled to free milk. The 1980 Education Act removed all requirements to supply free school meals except to the chioldren of parents on income support. The same Act abolished nutritional guidelines for school meals.

Since 1977 a universal milk scheme funded from an EC levy on dairy farmers has been the principal means of funding a subsidised school meal service for around 8.5 million pupils. The levy ended on 1st April 1993 but the proceeds will continue to fund the Scheme until 30th September 1993. From that point onwards the Scheme will be funded from the EC agriculture budget. The scale of that funding looks set to be cut by around a half from 1st January 1994.

Funding of the UK School Milk Scheme by the EC[Source MAFF]
1990 ... £133m
1991 ... £130m
1992 ... £165m
1993 ... £175m
1994 ... £82m**

** The figure for 1994 is a projection based on the assumption that the proposed 50% cut in funding goes ahead.

The cut in subsidy is likely to be on the agenda at the September Agriculture Council. A pre-emptive decision to scrap the subsidies on cheese and buttermilk has already been taken unilaterally by the UK Government and came into effect from 1st April 1993. Only the UK has made this cut.

Children of all ages attending schools in both the state and independent sector are eligible. There is no obligation on the part of a local authority to provide subsidised milk except in the case of pupils whose parents are in receipt of income support. The subsidy is available on any whole or semi skimmed milk and yoghurts with a compositional level above 1.5% fat content.

The United Kingdom accounts for about 25% of EC funding available for the subsidisation of milk and dairy products in schools throughout the Community. The disbursement of funds is organised through the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce. Local Authorities purchase the milk either ready packaged for consumption in 1/3 pint containers or for use as an ingredient in a school meal. A total of 21m gallons of milk had received aid by 1st April 1993 .

The local authorities must now decide whether to fund the Scheme through cuts elsewhere in their already under resourced budgets, purchase less milk or put the full price increase onto the cost of a carton or bottle. The present EC subsidy is approximately 75% of the purchase price. Milk is a key ingredient of a healthy diet. The milk taken out of the scheme will instead contribute to the already burgeoning surpluses wasting away in storage. There is already 10,761 tonnes of butter and 480 tonnes of skim milk powder [SMP] to the value of £26m held in intervention stocks. A further 2,000 tonnes of SMP valued at £3.8m is expected to have entered intervention by 31st August 1993.

For Immediate Release: 2 September 1993
147/93

PRENTICE CALLS FOR FOUR WEEKS OFF

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing the Government to implement the EC Directive which would give everyone in Britain the right to four weeks paid annual holiday.

The Pendle MP said: "Amazing as it may seem, nobody in John Major's classless Britain has a legal right to a paid annual holiday. Every other EC country gives people a legal right to paid annual holidays. In half the EC countries people get between 25 and 30 days off.

"The new EC Working Time Directive would give everyone in the EC a legal right to at least four weeks paid annual holiday - but the British Government won't accept this. Why is it that people here should work the longest hours in Europe and not be entitled to a holiday. That's why I am calling on the Government to give everyone in Britain at least four weeks holiday. Holidays for British people should be up wlth the best not worse than the worst."

ends

Note to Editors: No-one in Britain has a statutory right to a paid annual holiday. This makes Britain unique in the whole of the European Community. Taken overall, British workers have the longest hours in the EC and the worst holiday entitlement.

The Working Time Directive agreed at the EC Social Affairs Council of Ministers on 1 June provides, amongst other things, that every worker in the European Community should have four weeks paid annual holiday. The Government have said they will challenge the Directive in the European Court because hours worked and holiday entitlements have nothing to do with health and safety and therefore can't be decided on a majority vote.

The Tory Government claim that limiting hours and improving holiday entitlements will threaten jobs. This is obvious nonsense. The whole history of putting limits on hours worked and extending holiday entitlements shows that it creates jobs by limiting the time which can be put in by individual workers. More people working shorter hours is the alternative to fewer people working longer hours. The average working week in Britain in 1920 was 60 hours. If that still applied today the level of unemployment would clearly be far higher. (more follows)

Call for four weeks off

The other Tory claim is that improving hours and holidays together with other social improvements is pricing EC producers out of the world markets. The facts of the EC economies show this also to be nonsense. If the Tory argument were true, then Brltain, with the worst hours and holidays and with amongst the poorest social provision would be the most prosperous country in the EC, with the best balance of trade wlth the rest of the world and the highest value exports per head.

In fact Britain's standard of living has fallen to eighth place in the EC. Britain's trade balance with the rest of the world (excluding the EC) is the worst in the community.

For Immediate Release: 2 September 1993
148/93

MP LAMENTS END OF POSTMARK

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has described the imminent end of the distinctive **"Burnley and Pendle"** postmark as a blow to the area's local identity. The Post Office is to abolish the postmark on Monday 13 September when the new Automated Processing Centre in Preston becomes operational and replace it with the new "**Lancashire and the South Lakes**".

From that date all mail posted in the PR, BB, FY and LA (except for Barrow in Furness) postcode areas will be directed to and sorted at the APC.

Prentice said: "When the proposal was first floated last year I contacted Sir Bryan Nicholson, the Chairman of the Post Office urging him to pigeonhole the whole idea. Clearly, the many representations from councils - including our own here in Pendle - and other community bodies fell on deaf ears and we now find ourselves dumped into this strange, ill defined sub region."

"I shall be going over to Preston shortly to see the new APC in operation and I intend to quiz the Post Office experts precisely why it was apparently impossible to sort the incoming mail by district and, therefore, preserve the distinctive local postmarks."

For Immediate Release: 2 September 1993
149/93

PENDLE MP BLASTS ROYAL STAFF WAGE RATES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hit out at low wage rates paid to staff employed in the Royal Household. His attack comes at a time when the Government is abolishing the Wages Councils, described by the MP as the "last line of defence for the nation's low paid".

Prentice said: "The revelations in the press this week that the Queen is introducing performance related pay for people working at Buckingham Palace and the other Royal establishments only served to highlight the low pay rates which currently apply. It is common knowledge the staff aren't paid a King's Ransom but I wasn't aware some were paid Wages Council rates either. The **Financial Times** tells us, for example, that among the 400 domestic staff, maids receive pre-tax earnings of £6,000 (£120 per week) and footmen £7,000 (£140 per week). Royal chefs are up there in the stratosphere earning £13,000 a year. Now that performance related pay has been introduced into the Royal Household I see no logical reason why the principle should not be extended to the Royal Family itself."

"In my own area of North East Lancashire, where there are no Royal Palaces, poverty pay is an endemic problem and the abolition of the Wages Councils last Monday (30 August) will make things infinitely worse. Despite all our efforts in Parliament, the Government has gone ahead with this mean minded attack on people on low wages especially ones working in shops, hotels, catering and hairdressing. Here in the North West 345,000 people work in jobs previously covered by the Wages Councils which set minimum wages of up to £3.10 per hour."

For Immediate Release: 23 September 1993
150/93

PENDLE JOBLESS HITS ANOTHER HIGH

The August jobless total for Pendle has hit a thirteen month high and the number of people out of work and claiming benefit at 3,237 is the third

highest monthly total since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990. The figure then was 1,708.

Prentice said: "The July figure of 3,234 was the highest for a year and we all hoped for an improvement in August. Clearly, things are seriously wrong when unemployment continues to rise during the summer months when seasonal work usually means more jobs."

"It will take a miracle for this Government to get unemployment down to the figure John Major inherited from his predecessor" said the MP.

"This is the Government that told the nation *unemployment was a price well worth paying* to get inflation down. And we are still paying the price for that policy. What is needed, now more than ever, is a commitment to full employment as the central objective of economic policy.

151/93

PRENTICE CALLS FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY ON THORP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has demanded a public inquiry into the proposed start up of the THORP nuclear reprocesssing facility at Sellafield. The MP told Environment Secretary, John Gummer, that the claims and counterclaims from BNFL (British Nuclear Fuels) and organisations such as *Greenpeace* made the case for an independent inquiry.

"We have all been bombarded with facts and figures about THORP and what is now needed is a cool headed, objective assessment of all the pros and cons. I have already responded to the Government's totally inadequate "consultation exercise" to say that THORP is out of date and unnecessary. There is tremendous anxiety - especially here in the North West - about this nuclear white elephant. Once it is started up the whole thing will go radioactive and it will take millions of pounds to close it down. Much better not to activate THORP in the first place.

"I appreciate there are those who disagree with this line of reasoning and an inquiry is clearly the answer."

ends

Note to Editors: The Government announced on 4 August 1993 another round of public consultation on THORP. This consultation ended earlier this week (4 October).

Last year BNFL applied for revised authorisations under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 to discharge radioactive waste from its reprocessing site at Sellafield to allow for the operation of its Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP). THORP will reprocess spent nuclear fuel from advanced gas cooled and pressurised water reactors. The Government has said a final decision on whether to have a public inquiry would not be taken until after the consultation which ended on 4 October.

Unemployment in Britain 1948-1993

Year	Unemployed	Unemployed per vacancy
1948	273.4	0.8
1949	236.8	0.8
1950	261.8	1
1951	175.5	0.5
1952	292.4	1.3
1953	257.4	1.2
1954	208.8	0.8
1955	165.7	0.5
1956	192.7	0.8
1957	230.1	1.1
1958	362.1	2.6
1959	373.9	2
1960	281.7	1.1
1961	249.5	1
1962	380.1	2.3
1963	436	2.7
1964	312.2	1.2
1965	275	0.9
1966	258.2	0.9
1967	472.1	2.6
1968	504.9	2.5
1969	486.6	2.3
1970	527.9	2.6
1971	719	5.5
1972	775.1	5.1
1973	535.4	1.6
1974	542.5	1.6
1975	944.4	6.6
1976	1402.5	11
1977	1553.5	9.6
1978	1512.5	7
1979	1392	5.4
1980	1811.9	13.7
1981	2744	28.5
1982	3069.8	26.9
1983	2903.5	18.6
1984	2978.9	18
1985	3116.2	18.5
1986	3150.2	15.8
1987	2778.5	11.5
1988	2208.5	8.6
1989	1663.6	7.4
1990	1524.1	8.7
1991	2263.9	21.2
1992	2663.8	22.3
1993	2821.1	22.3

For Immediate Release: 6 October 1993
152/93

HALF BLIND COLNE PENSIONER MUST PAY FOR CONTACT LENSES say Health Chiefs

Colne pensioner, Dorothy Shanley, has been told she must stump up £292 bill every year for contact lenses the doctors say she needs to see. She says she is entitled to free treatment - having paid towards the NHS all through her life - and refuses to pay.

The news from Burnley NHS Trust has infuriated local MP, Gordon Prentice, who has vowed not to let the matter rest until his 70 year old constituent gets the free treatment he believes she is entitled to.

Prentice was outraged when he first learnt his pensioner constituent - who is blind without her contact lenses and glasses - had been told by Burnley Health Care Trust to stand ready to pay for her lenses the next time she visited the eye clinic at Burnley General. The furious MP demanded an explanation from Health Minister John Bowis MP who said the charges could be waived if Mrs Shanley's condition were diagnosed as a "technical non tolerance" case. The Minister said she could get help if her eye condition changed frequently.

Prentice said: "We are now in yet another Alice in Wonderland situation. The Consultant Opthalmologist says Mrs Shanley needs new lenses every three months to prevent the old ones causing infection. But because there is no need for the prescription to change (to vary the power of the lens) then my constituent is to be saddled with this recurring bill she cannot afford. I believe there could be as many as 15 - 20 people in the area in exactly the same boat."

"The situation is absurd, indefensible and has got to be changed. I have drawn all the facts of this case to the Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, and I expect a positive response.

more follows

"In the absence of a clear, unequivocal assurance from the Government that Mrs Shanley and people like her are to be helped then I shall be raising the matter on the floor of the House of Commons."

Note to editors:
Mrs Dorothy Shanley, who needs new contact lenses every three months was told by Burnley Health Care Trust in June she would possibly have to pay over £73 a time to have them fitted. Mrs Shanley of 117 Cleveland Street, Colne, has had an operation to remove cataracts from both eyes and needs contact lenses and glasses to see at all. Without them she cannot see the fingers on her hands when her arms are outstretched. She was told an operation could help but the doctors couldn't guarantee it would be 100% successful. Understandably, she opted for the alternative of contact lenses fitted every three months. Without contact lenses she would need enormously heavy spectacles with lenses as thick as the bottom of a milk bottle.

Extracts from the letter of 29 July 1993 from Health Minister, John Bowis MP, to local MP, Gordon Prentice:

"The letter (from Burnley Health Care Trust to Mrs Shanley and other patients) *suggests that new changes for contact lenses come into effect from 1 August. This is not an accurate representation of the position. The most recent general guidance on the Hospital Eye Service (HES) was issued in 1989 and charges for contact lenses were being made long before that...*

"The position in Burnley arose from a local misinterpretation of the guidelines. I understand that previously, on the erroneous advice from a local consultant opthalmologist, no charges were made for contact lenses prescribed through the HES. Although this error was corrected after being drawn to the attention of the Chairman of the Burnley Trust, the position was further confused by the rather unclear letter issued by the Trust to their contact lens clinic patients. This is the letter received by Mrs Shanley. Officials from this Department have now contacted the Trust Chairman once more, asking that corrected advice be given to patients.

"Turning specifically to Mrs Shanley and the charges for her lenses, it would appear the her condition is what is described as a "technical non-tolerance" case. Simply, this refers to patients whose eye conditions are altering progressively and who therefore require frequent changes of lenses. Such patients need only pay for the first pair of lenses prescribed. Details of these arrangements are given in the 1989 guidance referred to above. Her consultant will be able confirm whether or not she falls into this category.

For Immediate Release: 11 October 1993
153/93

SPEED UP THE CLEAN UP! says MP

In a bid to speed the clean up of the polluted Stocks Beck at Bracewell, local MP Gordon Prentice is to meet on site the North West regional chief of the National Rivers Authority - the body charged by Parliament with the task of policing the nation's watercourses.

"The main cause of the pollution is the Barnoldswick sewage works although there are other culprits. The NRA has told me they are in negotiation with North West Water who, at the end of the day, are responsible for cleaning things up. The idea that we may have to wait until well into the next century - until 2,005 - to get clean, unpolluted water is simply not on."

"The Government has given North West Water a Corporation Tax holiday. They don't pay a farthing to the Treasury yet the privatised monopoly pays a fortune to its Directors in six figure salaries and gold plated share option schemes. The entire water industry needs to clean up its act" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 7 October 1993
154/93

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR OPEN ACCESS TO COUNTRYSIDE

Uncultivated land that is currently "out of bounds" to members of the public should be opened up and made available to ramblers, hill walkers and those who simply want to enjoy the countryside says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"It is a national disgrace that thousands of square miles of land are no go areas - sterilised by "PRIVATE" and "KEEP OUT" signs. Over two hundred square miles of land on our own doorstep in the Forest of Bowland is fenced off for no good reason and I want to see that changed. The struggle to get access to Britain's moors and mountains has been going on for generations but it is time we moved up a gear.

"Many wealthy landowners already get big tax breaks to open up their land to ramblers but no-one seems to be checking whether they do or not. I want to see open access to our moorlands for all the people who hunger for a bit of open space and open skies. And I want all landowners who claim full exemption from inheritance tax to show the full extent of public access in a register kept for that purpose by the local authority."

Note to Editors: Landowners can claim full exemption from Inheritance Tax by virtue of S31 of the 1984 Inheritance Taxes Act. On 19 March 1993, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury told the Pendle MP: "The owner of land that has been conditionally exempted from inheritance tax is already required to publicise the agreed public access arrangements. *The extent of the publicity depends on the facts of each case.* The owner will *generally* be required to take specific steps to publicise public access, for example by advertising the access arrangements in a local tourist office or town hall. The appropriate heritage advisory agency, for example the Countryside Commission for scenic land in England, is able to supply information about public access to heritage land including conditionally exempt land, although land will not be identified as conditionally exempt."

For Immediate Release: 6 October 1993
155/93

MAGISTRATE QUITS AFTER 25 YEARS

Long serving local magistrate, Cyril Hughes, has resigned from the Pendle Bench after service spanning over a quarter of a century. His shock decision follows widespread disillusionment amongst magistrates at the proposed merger with Burnley Court.

The proposal - widely trailed in the local press - could mean the closure of the Court at Reedley and the transfer of all work to Burnley although there have been suggestions that family work could be retained at Reedley - but possibly only as a stop gap.

Colin Pollard - a colleague of Mr Hughes on the Pendle Bench - created a storm recently when he hinted the Burnley move could provoke a cascade of resignations from the Bench. The increased travelling time and costs - especially for those living in the West Craven area would be a big deterrent he said.

Mr Hughes said: "I am totally fed up with all the chopping and changing in the criminal justice system over recent years. The Government has been testing

the loyalty of people on the Bench. They bring in unit fines one minute and scrap them the next. One moment the Courts are told in some cases not to take into account previous convictions then, in the next breath, it is changed back again. What on earth is happening? The Bench supposed to be a cross section of the local community but I am convinced all the recent changes will deter some people - particularly manual workers - from applying to become magistrates.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "It is an absolute tragedy to see someone of the stature of Cyril Hughes leave the Bench. Local courts are losing people with priceless local experience. I intend to raise the whole issue in the Commons. Magistrates here and throughout the country are totally disenchanted and it is about time the Government addressed their legitimate concerns.

For Immediate Release: 20 October 1993
156/93

PENDLE PENSIONERS SAY NO TO VAT ON FUEL

Pendle pensioners joined thousands of others at Westminster today to lobby MPs over the Government's VAT on fuel plans which were announced in this year's Budget. The controversial proposals will have to be voted on by the Commons next month.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I know there is tremendous disquiet throughout Pendle - and indeed the rest of the country - about the impact of VAT on fuel especially on people just above the income support level. This was the message I was getting from the pensioners today."

"The Government claims the very poorest will be protected but who amongst us has any confidence in what they say? We have yet to see the details and with this Government you need a magnifying glass to examine the small print."

ends

Note to Editors:

Despite its overwhelming unpopularity, the Tories have said that they will not back down on the extension of VAT to gas and electricity. After the Christchurch by-election, John Major said -

"I am not going to reconsider the policy of VAT on fuel"

The Liberal Democrats are trying to make the running on VAT. The fact is they went into the last General Election with a commitment to end "the anomalous zero rate of VAT on fuel".

For Immediate Release: 15 October 1993
157/93

PENDLE JOBLESS STILL OVER 3,000

The area's jobless total fell last month (September) to 3,065 from an August high of 3,237 - the 0.5% drop the highest percentage decrease in the North West Region's 28 Travel To Work Areas.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The reduction is very welcome but Pendle is still stuck with summertime unemployment which is still unacceptably high. The September figure is the seventh highest monthly total in the 35 months that John Major has been Prime Minister."

"The fact that we have had the largest percentage decrease in the North West Region is cold comfort for those desperately looking for work. There is no cause for celebration when one in nine men in Pendle is out of work" said the MP.

Note to Editors: Of the 3,065 people registered out of work and claiming benefit in Pendle in September, 2,339 were men and 726 women. The total unemployment rate (expressed as a percentage of the workforce was 8.1%.) (Male 10.8% and female 4.5%) North West September 1993 unemployment rates are shown below:

Ac'ton/ Ross'dale	8.1	Manchester	10.6
Barrow	10.6	Northwich	8
Blackburn	10.1	Oldham	11.8
Blackpool	7.6	**Pendle**	**8.6**
Bolton/Bury	10.5	Penrith	4.2
Burnley	8.7	Preston	8.5
Carlisle	6.8	Rochdale	12.4
Clitheroe	4.1	Warrington	7.6
Crewe	9.9	Whitehaven	11.5
Kendal	4.1	Widnes/Runcorn	12.2
Keswick	4.4	Wigan/St Helens	12.7
Lancaster/Morc	10.3	Windermere	3.8
Liverpool	15.3	Wirral & Chester	12.4
Macclesfield	5.3	Workington	13.1

For Immediate Release: 8 October 1993
158/93

JOB OPPORTUNITIES - THE CABINET DID OK says PENDLE MP

Cabinet Ministers had good job opportunities when they left school or college and they should provide the same chance in life for today's school leavers and graduates here in Pendle said local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice said: "Today in Britain there are 22 people chasing every job vacancy. That makes life desperate for school leavers and graduates here in the North West but it wasn't always like this. When the Tories came to power there were 5 people chasing every job.

"When you look at the years when Cabinet Ministers left school or college the contrast with today is really sickening. When John Major left school in 1959 there were just 2 people chasing every vacancy. Under his premiership the situation is eleven times as bad."

"When you look at David Hunt, the Employment Secretary, the contrast is even more startling. When he graduated there were more vacancies than people seeking work. It was much the same with the rest of the Cabinet. It's about time they set about giving today's young people the sort of job opportunities they had themselves."

ends

Note to editors: Unemployment figures and vacancies tracked back to 1948 are enclosed.

For Immediate Release: 11 October 1993
159/93

MP BACKS ASTHMA CAMPAIGN

Britain is in the grip of an asthma crisis according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The Pendle MP has published a five point plan to tackle the problem which affects three million people in the UK - 700,000 of them under the age of 16.

The MP's initiative follows moves by the National Asthma Campaign to draw attention to the link between asthma and air pollution.

Prentice said: "There are twice as many children suffering from asthma today as there were ten years ago. Pollution from road traffic has increased by 72% in the same period and few would deny there is a link."

"I want to see a firm commitment by the Government to meet the European Community's legal standards at all sites and at all times and to meet the stricter guideline standards whenever and wherever possible. We also need a major expansion of the national air quality monitoring network and useful air quality bulletins on the local media. And we also need action to encourage the retrofitting of catalytic converters to existing vehicles.

"Air quality problems are particularly acute in the big urban areas but asthma can strike down people living anywhere - even here in Pendle with its collar of open countryside. Anyone suffering from this condition knows how crippling it can be" said the MP.

Note to Editors.

•One in seven children suffers from the disease
•In 1992 there were almost 2,000 deaths in the UK attributable to asthma
•Prescriptions for asthma rose from 15 million top 28 million between 1981 and 1991
•Asthma is the only treatable chronic condition in the western world which is on the increase.

more follows

Asthma Crisis

As well as the human suffering there is an economic cost. Around 7 million working days are lost through asthma every year. The cost is an estimated £350m in lost productivity, £60m in sickness benefit and £400m to the NHS.

Any health strategy that claims to take seriously preventative medicine would address the causes of asthma - in particular the polluted air in our cities which is behind the spiralling increase in the disease. There is a clear correlation between emissions of nitrogen dioxides from road transport and the incidence of asthma.

The London Scientific Services Laboratory claims the UK may be in breach of the legal limits set by the European Community for nitrogen dioxide. The Government has implemented the EC Directive on Nitrogen Dioxide in a minimalist fashion. There are only 12 monitoring stations in the entire country. In Japan there are over 1,500 and in Germany 215.

For Immediate Release: 19 October 1993
160/93

INQUIRY TO SETTLE FATE OF LANCASHIRE'S "NOMADIC" WARDS

The future of the Ribble Valley wards of Read, Sabden and Simonstone is likely to be put under the microscope next month when the Parliamentary Boundary Commission gets down to work on the new shape of Lancashire's Westminster constituencies.

The Commission's Inquiry will start at County Hall, Preston on Monday 29 November and one of the key issues to be settled will be the fate of the three Ribble Valley wards. The Boundary Commission wants to detach them from the Ribble Valley constituency and bolt them on to neighbouring Pendle.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The people of Read, Sabden and Simonstone have been passed from pillar to post over recent years. Simonstone must be the most nomadic ward in the North West of England. Before the last Parliamentary Constituency review, Simonstone was part of the old Clitheroe seat. Then it was transferred to Burnley constituency at the last review. Then it went to Ribble Valley at last year's General Election. Now the Commission want to put it into Pendle - four constituencies in fifteen years! I think they deserve a breathing space."

"Of all the changes proposed for Lancashire, the one affecting the three Ribble Valley wards has provoked, by far and away, the greatest reaction. It is clear from the enormous number of written submissions that the people living there don't want to be moved out of Ribble Valley. For myself, I believe Pendle should stay as it is - an identifiable community where the constituency and Borough Council share the same boundary."

Note to Editors: The Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England published its provisional recommendations for the constituency boundaries in Lancashire on 17 June 1993. The Commission recommended a reduction in the number of constituencies 16 to 15 because of falling population.

more follows

Written representations are available for inspection by the public at the Town Hall, Nelson (and at all other Lancashire local authorities) and the Inquiry is open to all interested persons who can make their views known to the Assistant Commissioner presiding at the Inquiry - whether or not they made a written submission.

The Commission stresses that Inquiries are informal affairs. The Commission may revise its provisional recommendations. The final report is submitted to Parliament for approval. Any changes will apply from the next General Election.

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For Immediate Release: 20 October 1993
161/93

LANCASHIRE'S NEW RURAL DEVELOPMENT AREA MAP GETS THUMBS DOWN

The new rural development area map of Lancashire has been given the thumbs down by local MP, Gordon Prentice, and his colleagues from Burnley and Rossendale and Darwen, Peter Pike and Janet Anderson.

The MPs tabled a Commons motion expressing deep concern at the Rural Development Commission's proposals which would cut by two thirds the area in Lancashire eligible for special grants and assistance aimed at fostering the growth of jobs and rural services.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "In my own area, the wards of Coates and Craven would cease to qualify and this is obviously very bad news. But there are other implications. The motion I tabled at Westminster draws attention to the possible knock on effect this decision could have on our current bid for *Objective 5b status* which channels Euro cash into rural areas. The bid for Euro cash is for the area corresponding to the present RDA map - which could possibly shrink to one third of its former size."

Note to Editors: The Early Day Motion reads: *That this House expresses its deep concern at the Rural Development Commission's Review of Priority Areas which proposes to reduce severely the extent of RDA coverage in Lancashire and which could imperil the current bid for European funds from the award of Objective 5b status, the map for which corresponds closely to the coverage of the county's present Rural Development Area.*

For Immediate Release: 19 October 1993
162/93

GOVERNMENT URGED TO TACKLE LANCASHIRE'S HOUSING CRISIS
(NOT SENT)

(call from Peter Pike to say Young won't see a delegation of more than six and the Bishop already has five lined up. 20/10/93)

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to press the Government's housing supremo, Sir George Young, to get to grips with Lancashire's housing crisis.

At the top level meeting in Westminster next Monday (25 October) at the Minister's Whitehall HQ

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has described the Lancashire Housing Inquiry report, published today, as the most comprehensive survey of the county's housing needs ever undertaken. The East Lancashire MP said the report underlined the gravity of the housing situation and no clearer evidence could be provided for an urgent programme of action underpinned by a massive injection of cash from central government.

Prentice said: "The Bishop of Burnley, the Rt Revd Ronald Milner, and the rest of his team, have done us all a tremendous service in pulling this vast compendium of information together and giving it such coherence. The decrepit state of much of Lancashire's housing is there, in the report, in black and white and it demands a considered reponse from the Housing Minister, Sir George Younger.

"In my own constituency of Pendle, we have the highest percentage in Lancashire of housing built before 1919 (65.3%). 4.9% of our dwellings are unfit (1,759) and a colossal 41.8% are fit but need renovation (14,922). The most recent figures show that Pendle Council was able to give 228 renovation grants at an average grant of £4,913 but these figures show the scale of the unmet need. Over £73m would be needed to bring Pendle's housing stock up to scratch - a Herculean task without backing and support from the Government.

ends

Note to Editors Extract from Lancashire Housing Inquiry findings:

1. Who owns what?

•Owner occupation in Lancashire has reached 76.5% compared to a figure of 66.4% for the UK as a whole.
•Under the policy of "Right to Buy", 27,000 tenants have purchased their council houses. This has led to a 27% reduction in houses available for rent and a 5% shift from Council housing to owner occupation.
•Council housing now represents only 13.4% of Lancashire's housing stock compared to a figure of 21.4% for the UK as a whole. On the west coast and in central Lancashire council housing provides lO% or less of total housing stock (Fylde 6%; Wyre 7%.
•Housing Associations provide just over 2.4% of Lancashire's houses. In 1993 they were building just 696 houses - not even enough to keep pace with losses due to "Right to Buy".

2. The condition of our homes

•Pre-l919 terraced housing provides 38.1% of the county's private sector stock compared to 29.3% for the UK as a whole.
•In Blackburn, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale over 50% of the private sector housing stock was built before 1919.
•9.5% of Lancashire's private housing is unfit by today's standards. A further 21.7% is fit but in need to renovation. Even assuming no further deterioration it would take at least 25 years at present investment levels to treat all these properties.

•Extrapolation of current clearance rates would produce a replacement cycle for Lancashire's housing stock of 1,000 years!
•Fewer houses are being dealt with under the House Renovation Grants system in place since 1989 although more 100% grants are given and more is spent on each grant: this has produced "spot" treatment of individual properties rather than allowing local authorities the freedom to target resources into areas of their own choosing.
•Lancashire authorities have responded positively to the need for renovation but they are all constrained by a cost ceiling of £13,000 per property under the Renewal Areas scheme.
•Changes introduced in the 1988 Housing Act have caused Housing Associations to reduce substantially their rehabilitation activities in favour of building new houses. Many associations would like to allocate a greater proportion of their resources to renovation but the current funding regime discourages this.

3. Homelessness

•The number of households presenting themselves to local authorities as homeless has doubled over the last three years, but the number accepted as homeless has remained relatively static: in 1991-92, 10,009 households presented themselves as homeless but only 2,978 were accepted and rehoused.
•The problem of the non-statutory homeless in Lancashire, ie those who may well be homeless but who do not have a "priority need" according to legislation, is impossible to quantify. That there is a large and growing number, being dealt with by a variety of dedicated voluntary organisations with inadequate and erratic funding, is beyond question.

4. Property Values

•Property values in the west of the county are generany far higher than those in the east; districts in the west also are the ones with the lowest percentage of affordable rented housing. This combination of high prices and relatively greater scarcity of socially rented housing is also present in Chorley, South Ribble and Ribble Valley.
•By contrast, East Lancashire has some of the lowest priced housing in the country.
•The relative scarcity of socially rented housing and the cheapness of terraced housing in East Lancashire has forced many families into owner occupation "at the margins". As a consequence people stretch their resources to buy a small, older property but cannot afford the costs of maintenance or improvement. Unless at least two-thirds of renovation costs is grant-aided it is not a viable economic proposition to engage in house improvements.

5. Housing Needs

•There are 34,000 households on council housing waiting lists in Lancashire.
•Overcrowding is a major problem in Burnley, Blackburn, Hyndburln, Pendle and Preston.
•The needs of the elderly are a particular problem for housing authorities in the north and west of Lancashire which have high proportions of residents over retirement age.

For Immediate Release: 25 March 1993
163/93

Not Used

For Immediate Release: 20 October 1993
164/93

MP SLAMS DOWNGRADING OF NELSON POST OFFICE

Moves to franchise the Crown Post Office in Nelson have been slammed by local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says plans by Post Office Counters Ltd to hand the running of the branch to an agency would give a poorer service to the town.

The MP's attack comes at a time when Post Office Counters is consulting the public on the future of the Nelson branch. They claim the existing services of the branch would be maintained but the office would move to a different location and the franchisee would be able to run another business alongside.

The MP commented: "It seems to me this is yet another step on the road to full scale privatisation. Franchising our network of Post Offices is treating them like hamburger joints. The fact is that no political Party said they would privatise the Post Office in their General Election manifestos last year and nor was it mentioned in the Queen's Speech. Every review since 1980 supports it staying in the public sector where it has notched up record profits for 16 consecutive years. Last year it made £247m and over the past decade it has contributed £750m to the Government's coffers. In Counter Services 96% of people are served within 5 minutes by well trained and highly motivated staff."

Prentice commented: "The Post Office has been in public ownership for 350 years and it provides an accessible, affordable and universal service. So why on earth tamper with it? If it ain't broke, don't mend it!"

Note to Editors: Those wishing to object should write to the Retail Network Manager, Post Office Counters Ltd, Capstan House, Chandler's Point. 35 Broadway, Salford Quays, Salford M5 2YY by 5 November 1993.

For Immediate Release: 20 October 1993
165/93

MP WELCOMES REPORT ON "UNFIT" COMPANY DIRECTORS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed the publication today of the National Audit Office report on unfit company directors who walk away unscathed from their insolvent companies. The report on the *Insolvency Service Executive Agency* from the public spending watchdog throws a spotlight on the behaviour of rogue directors - and the appalling record of the Insolvency Service in bringing them to book.

The National Audit Office report revealed that fewer than one fifth of directors who show signs of being unfit to run their companies are being pursued for disqualification. And even in cases of serious misconduct, the Government has taken legal action against only two thirds of them.

The report shows there have been about 153,000 corporate insolvencies from 1987 to 1993 of which 28,541 - or 19% - involved unfit conduct. About 15% of these cases (4,278) involved serious "public interest" breaches but there had been just 2,891 instances where disqualification proceedings against directors had been started and only 1,700 directors had been disqualified.

Prentice said: "It is as plain as a pikestaff that the Insolvency Service needs a good shake up. The Government clearly has a very laid back attitude about the whole business. Companies House - which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry - doesn't even keep a complete list of disqualified directors and doesn't check to ensure they do not take up any new directorships.

Last June, the Pendle MP called for an urgent review of the law to crack down on company directors "disappearing in a puff of blue smoke and leaving a trail of devastation and misery in their wake". At the time, the MP said he had a number of "these wretched con men" in his sights "whose track record in folding up companies was truly awesome."

more follows

Unfit Directors

In July the MP tabled a Commons motion under the protection of Parliamentary privilege which called on the President of the Board of Trade to investigate the business dealings of Barrowford Builder, Alexander Schultz, to establish whether there had been any breaches by him of either the Companies or Criminal law. The report from the Department of Trade and Industry is awaited.

ends

Note to Editors: The Company Directors Disqualification Act (CDDA) 1986 identifies two main categories of conduct which render directors liable to disqualification. The first is general misconduct (eg fraud, persistent breaches of company law) and the second is unfitness (eg misapplication of funds, responsibility for transactions intended to defraud creditors and so on.)

On 27 July this year, Prentice called on the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, to mount an investigation into the activities of Barrowford house builder and company director, Alexander Schultz. The Pendle MP's demand for action was backed by his front bench colleague, Blackburn MP, Jack Straw.

The MPs demanded the probe into the business activities and track record of Mr Schultz to see whether he has breached the Companies Acts or the criminal law.

At the time the Pendle MP said: "I have had a stream of tradespeople come to see me about the activities of Alexander Schultz alleging they are owed thousands of pounds by this man. I have looked through bundles of documentation and heard the most distressing stories from constituents who had dealings with him and ended up losing a small fortune for work they did - but wasn't paid for. He just walked away from his debts. An urgent investigation into Alexander Schultz's business practices is required."

For Immediate Release: 21 October 1993

166/93

CUTS IN FUNDING FOR ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES "IMMENSELY DAMAGING" says PENDLE MP

Anxious teachers and parents from Pendle lobbied local MP, Gordon Prentice, at Westminster today to press the Government to rethink its policy of cutting funds for ethnic minority communities.

Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 has been an important source of funding of special educational needs, such as language support, for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. In April last year, the Home Office agreed to fund projects under this scheme in conjunction with the local authorities. The agreement was on the basis of the Home Office funding 75% of the cost of the projects and the local education authority funding 25% and contracts were entered into and projects started.

Prentice said: "Instead of carrying through the agreement, the Government has reneged on it without warning - despite the fact that contracts had been agreed and projects started. The Home Office contribution is to go down to 57% and then to 50% leaving local authorities to make up the difference."

"This puts the local authorities in an impossible position. In the present climate of cuts and capping how on earth are they to find the extra cash to help improve the educational opportunities of those children for whom English is a second language. Without this extra support schools cannot provide the level of help these children need and this, in turn, can put extra pressures on all teaching staff and, indeed, affect the provision for other children in the school."

"I wrote to the Home Office Minister responsible - Peter Lloyd - months ago to urge a rethink. His reply was couched in sympathetic terms but the message was uncompromising. The funds to help the children of our ethnic minority communities

learn the English language would have to be cut - along with other areas of public expenditure."

"The policy is dangerously short-sighted" said the MP.

Note to Editors: The letter from Peter Lloyd MP to Gordon Prentice MP dated 24 May is reproduced below.

Thank you for your letter of 6 May to Kenneth Clarke seeking clarification about funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. I am replying as the Minister with primary responsibility for this grant.

I should like to emphasise at once that we remain firmly committed to tackling the causes of disadvantage - lack of English being a prime example - which inhibits members o~ ethnic minorities from playing a full part in the social and economic life of the country. We are also very appreciative of the valuable work which has been, and continues to be, carried out by teachers and other staff supported by section 11 grant.

In the light of the above, I hope that you will assure your constituents that it was with much regret that, faced with the general economic situation and the consequential pressures on public expenditure programmes, we were driven to conclude that we would be unable to sustain throughout the next three years the level of expenditure on section 11 grant which we would have wished and which we had earlier planned. As you will appreciate, the economic situation has changed markedly since applications for section 11 funding were invited, and since decisions were taken about the approval of projects and the allocation of grant.

I am glad to say that, despite the severe pressures to which I referred, it has been possible to secure provision for 1993/94 which should be sufficient to enable us to continue to support existing projects at the current level of grant.

Unfortunately, overall pressures in the two subsequent years are such that I am afraid that it will be necessary, on the basis of current planning assumptions, to reduce the rate of grant to around 57% in 1994/95 and to around 50% in 1995/96.

I realise how disappointing all of this is both to local authorities, their staff and others such as school governors, and to the communities whom the grant is designed to benefit. I wish that it had not been necessary to reach such unwelcome decisions.

As soon as the funding position became clear, I was anxious that authorities and others should be put in the picture at the earliest opportunity, in the hope that the 16 months' notice, which it was possible to give before a reduction in the rate of grant would need to take effect, would be helpful to them in considering adjustment to their own financial planning. However, I certainly do not underestimate the difficulties which face authorities.

Despite the decisions which it has been necessary to take, the section 11 programme remains substantial - on present figures, around £97 million in

1995/96. I have also been anxious that we should work closely with authorities and other interested parties in order to ensure that the available funding achieves maximum benefit for members of ethnic minorities. To this end, we invited them to let us have their observations by the end of March about possible options for administration of the available funding. We are currently considering.the responses. I can assure you of my determination that the available funding should be used as fully and effectively as possible.

PETER LLOYD

For Immediate Release: 25 October 1993
167/93

NEW PAY DEAL MAY SHUT LOCAL PHARMACIES says MP

A pay deal imposed on pharmacists by the Department of Health may force local chemists to shut their doors to the public for good says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Under the new system, from 1 November, the Government will pay pharmacists £1.35p for each of the first 1,700 prescriptions they dispense every month compared with the £1.59p they get now. Under the new formula - which is an interim measure before a single flat rate payment is introduced in 1995 - chemists will receive 94.5p for every prescription over the 1,700 mark compared with the current 80.5p.

The MP commented: "This new set up clearly discriminates against the small local pharmacy in favour of the giants such as Boots. The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee claims 10% of chemist shops will lose up to 40% of their income and the Pharmacy Support Group representing 2,000 small independent chemists predicts 15% of pharmacies will close in the next two to three years."

"What on earth is the Government playing at? If our local pharmacies are forced to close, life is going to be made impossible for the old, the sick, pregnant women and others who want a chemist close by to dispense the medicines they need."

Note to Editors: Figures released by the Pharmaceutical Negotiating Services Committee show that in Lancashire 69 out of 302 pharmacies dispense fewer than 2,000 prescriptions per month.

For Immediate Release: 25 October 1993
168/93

PENDLE MP BACKS MOVE TO ALLOW WOMEN PRIESTS

A vote this Friday (29 October) in the House of Commons will decide whether women will be allowed into the priesthood of the Church of England. The vote on the *"Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure"* will settle the long running and often hotly argued debate on the rights of women to become priests in the established church.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be voting to allow the ordination of women. He says there is no conceivable justifuication in this day and age for excluding women from the priesthood. "Once the vote goes through - as I hope it will - people will find it hard to believe women were ever excluded from the priesthood if that was their calling."

"It is a strange product of history that has the House of Commons - and MPs of all faiths and none - pronouncing on this matter of central importance to the Church of England. I shall be voting in favour because I want to see women's rights extended but we really need to end this anomaly where the Church looks to Parliament to decide on its priesthood. We need to disestablish the Church of England."

ends

Note to Editors: Since 1987, around 1,300 women have been ordained deacon and, of these, over 150 are in charge of churches, 23 are canons of cathedrals, one is a rural dean and many are working as chaplains in universities, prisons,

hospitals and as industrial or commercial chaplains. Some are teaching in theological colleges or in theologoical departments of universities and many others are working in parishes as paid or unpaid curates.

In order for legislation to pass in the General Synod, it has to pass in all three Houses - Bishops, Clergy and Laity. The final vote on a matter of such importance has to be passed by a 2/3 majority in each of the three Houses.

more follows

Ordination of Women Priests

1973: First legislation to test the mind of the church on the principle of women's ordination referred to every diocese in the Church of England for discussion.

1975: General Synod: "That this Synod considers that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood." Passed in all three Houses.

1978: General Synod: "That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to prepare and bring forward legislation to remove the barriers to the ordination of women to the priesthood and their consecration to the episcopate." Passed in the Houses of Bishops and Laity but lost in the House of Clergy. Therefore it could not go forward.

1979: Movement for the Ordination of Women founded. The Bishop of Manchester was the first Moderator.

1984: General Synod: "That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to bring forward legislation to permit the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Provinces of Canterbury and York." Passed in all three Houses.

1985: The Deacons (Ordination of Women) Measure passed by General Synod in all three Houses.

1986: The Deacons (Ordination of Women) Measure passed by Parliament and received the Royal Assent.

1987: 750 women ordained as deacons, the first step in Holy Orders in the historic threefold ministry, deacons, priests and bishops, of the church. Every diocese in mainland England ordained women as deacons.

1988: General Synod: the present legislation in its first draft form introduced and passed in all three Houses.

1989: The draft went to the Revision Committee of General Synod which received over 400 amendments for consideration.
General Synod voted on the amendments brought to it by the Revision Committee. The final draft form of the two Measures emerged.

1990 - 1991: The legislation was referred to all 44 dioceses for debate and voting at all diocesan synods. It was also debated and voted on in all deanery synods and most parishes.

In the deanery synods, 71% of the synods voted in favour in both the Houses of Clergy and Laity (there are no bishops in deanery synods). In the dioceses, 38 of the 44 diocesan synods passed the legislation in both Houses.

Diocese	Bishps			Clergy			Laity		
	Aye	No	Abs	Aye	No	Abs	Aye	No	Abs
Black-burn	1	2	0	37	50	1	43	45	0
Brad-ford	1	0	1	44	21	0	48	16	1
Total	76	25	6	2,242	1,126	48	2,306	1,085	54

For Immediate Release: 26 October 1993
169/93

PENDLE MP SAYS NO TO PROPOSED HEALTH MERGER

Moves to merge the two local District Health Authorities to create a new East Lancashire Health Authority have been knocked for six by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He was responding to the public consultation on the proposal which closes in early November.

He says the proposal to bolt together Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Authority with Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale would produce a large and remote organisation, unable to deal effectively with local health concerns.

Prentice said: "Under the Conservative Government's reforms, the Health Service is now split along purchaser/provider lines with the health authorities buying health services from the hospitals. Bringing the two existing health authorities together will do nothing to promote more accountability or greater sensitivity to the needs of the area."

"The planned merger will save next to no money. The £172,000 which is mentioned is about 7% of administration costs and a minuscule 0.0002% of the total budget."

For Immediate Release: 26 October 1993
170/93

HALF BLIND COLNE PENSIONER WINS RIGHT TO FREE CONTACT LENSES

Dorothy Shanley, the half blind 70 year old Colne pensioner, has won the right to free contact lenses. Her victory comes after being told by the eye clinic at Burnley General on 8 June this year that she could be faced with an annual bill of £292 for the lenses she needs to see.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who has backed Mrs Shanley in her fight for free treatment, quizzed Health Minister Brian Mawhinney about the case in the Commons today. Prentice told the Minister the regulations were "as clear as mud" and that anomalies had to be ironed out urgently.

"This whole affair has caused tremendous anxiety to many people and it is simply not good enough for the Government to blame "local misinterpretation of the guidelines" by Burnley Health care Trust. You've got to be a Law Lord to interpret some of the regulations coming out of the Department of Health."

"I am told that about 20 to 30 people in the area suffer from the same complaint as Mrs Shanley and - in my opinion - they should all be in line for free treatment under the NHS. If there are any problems about this, patients should contact me with details."

ends

Note to editors:
Mrs Dorothy Shanley, who needs new contact lenses every three months was told by Burnley Health Care Trust in June she would possibly have to pay over £73 a time to have them fitted. Mrs Shanley of 117 Cleveland Street, Colne, has had an operation to remove cataracts from both eyes and needs contact lenses and glasses to see at all. Without them she cannot see the fingers on her hands when her arms are outstretched. She was told an operation could help but the doctors couldn't guarantee it would be 100% successful. Understandably, she opted for the alternative of contact lenses fitted every three months. Without contact lenses she would need enormously heavy spectacles with lenses as thick as the bottom of a milk bottle.

more follows

Contact Lenses

The Consultant Opthalmologist told the pensioner she needed new lenses every three months to prevent the old ones causing infection. But because there was no need for the prescription to change (to vary the power of the lens) then she would have to pay the full amount - £292 - unless her income was so low she qualified for special help.

The MP says full help is available if a clinical decision has been taken to replace lenses frequently to prevent the possibility of infection.

For Immediate Release: 26 October 1993
171/93

LOW PAY IN LANCASHIRE "A DISGRACE" says PENDLE MP

"Low pay in Lancashire is an absolute disgrace and is likely to get worse" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP was speaking at Westminster in advance of Thursday's late night adjournment debate on the subject which has been secured by the MP's next door neighbour - Burnley's Peter Pike.

"I shall be doing everything I can to help Peter throw a national spotlight on the scourge of low pay here in the North West. Low pay is particularly bad for women workers. Instead of doing something to help, the Tory Government has made matters worse by abolishing the Wages Councils which set a minimum wage for 345,100 people in the region."

"I believe that when people work for a living they should be paid a living wage. That's why the next Labour Government will bring Britain into line with the rest of the European Community and introduce a national minimum wage. That will lift thousands of families out of poverty and save the taxpayer a fortune because people on decent pay don't need to draw on benefits to make ends meet."

Note to Editors: Official figures show:

• In the North West there are over 190,000 full time workers being paid less than £150 per week. Over 120,000 of them are women.
• In the North West, there are over 150,000 part time female workers being paid less than £3.50 per hour. This is the third highest figure in the country.
• In the North West, there are 50,000 full time male workers being paid less than £3.50 per hour. This is the highest figure for any part of the country.

For Immediate Release: 27 October 1993
172/93

CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY UNDER FIRE

The Child Support Agency is claiming a string of victims in Pendle according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The Agency has come under fire recently for forcing absent fathers to make hugely increased maintenance payments - often at levels which will bankrupt them.

Prentice said: "It is obviously right and proper that fathers pay proper maintenance and no-one would challenge that. But the CSA is tracking down fathers who have already made a large settlement in favour of their previous partner and they are being asked to cough up more."

"I am dealing with a number of cases where the relationship has ended in divorce and the title of the family home has been handed over to the wife together with very substantial cash settlements and regular maintenance for the children. The fathers had since re-married and simply cannot afford to pay out what the CSA is demanding.

"At the heart of the issue is the fact that the CSA does not look at all the father's outgoings" said the MP.

The MP is pressing the Government for a full review of the operation of the Child Support Agency.

For Immediate Release: 28 October 1993
173/93

GOVERNMENT CLIMBDOWN ON POLICE PAY AND CONDITIONS

The controversial report of Sir Patrick Sheehy on the rank structure, pay and conditions of the police was gutted today of its most far reaching recommendations in a move designed to placate opposition amongst the police - and on the Tory backbenches.

The 382 page report which was presented to the Government in June created uproar in the police. It proposed 10 year fixed term contracts for all officers followed by five year contracts coupled with greater possibilities for removing police officers for reasons other than breaches of discipline. It proposed performance related pay and the abolition of overtime. The ranks of Chief Inspector, Chief Superintendent and Deputy Chief Constable were to be abolished to thin out the management structure.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "We have yet to see what this means in practice when the smoke clears. But is it clear 80% of Sheehy has been dumped in the waste paper bin. What we got from Michael Howard in the Commons today was a statement of broad principles but he ducked many of the critically important details. There will be no fixed term contracts - other than for the top ranks - or performance related pay and thousands of policemen and women will be breathing a sigh of relief. But what is going to happen to police overtime? That is still up in the air. And will the thinning out of the middle managment ranks help cut crime or simply cut costs?"

"The Government has drawn back from swallowing the Sheehy Report in undiluted form. But the mixture could still cause problems" said the Pendle MP.

For Immediate Release: 28 October 1993
174/93

CHARTER MARK FOR NORWEB "PREPOSTEROUS" says PENDLE MP

The award yesterday (27 October) of a *Charter Mark* - the seal of approval of John Major's Citizen's Charter - to the privatised North West electricity monopoly NORWEB has been ridiculed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"You could have knocked me over with a feather when I heard NORWEB had scooped this award of doubtful value. It clearly recognises the distinctive contribution the company has made in increasing the personal wealth of its directors over recent years."

"NORWEB's profits increased 14% from March 92 to March 93 and the company was shamed into cutting electricity prices by 1.6% last July. They are selling less electricity - because of the recession - but are generating bigger profits and paying bigger dividends to shareholders."

"This *Charter Mark* should have been awarded for bare faced cheek and daylight robbery. At a time when the Government was urging pay restraint, Chairman Kenneth Harvey, saw his pay increase this year by £23,644 to £208,287. This was on top of a salary hike the previous year which took his pay from £105,135 in 1991 to £184,643."

"Mr Harvey also has share options worth more than £250,000. This *Charter Mark* is a complete joke."

For Immediate Release: 1 November 1993
175/93

MP LAUNCHES PROBE ON TRAINING

Training provision needs to be put under the microscope according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. His call follows recent disclosures which showed Training and Enterprise Councils holding more than £200 million cash in the bank at a time when the Chancellor was looking at ways to cut back on public spending.

Prentice said: "The TECs are there to spearhead the nation's training effort and not act as Post Offices or Savings Banks. They should be spending every penny they possibly can on top quality training."

"Sadly, I get reports from time to time that the organisations that provide the training - and receive public funds via the Training and Enterprise Councils - are not always up to scratch and I want to hear from people locally who may have concerns about training standards - perhaps from their own direct experience of a training course."

"Vast sums of public money are going into training but there is very little public accountability. I want to see our local Training and Enterprise Council ELTEC open its Board to elected representatives of the local district and borough councils. And I want to see the local authorities themselves monitor more closely the scope, quality and focus of the training effort in North East Lancashire."

ends

Note to Editors: Responsibility for the delivery of publicly-funded training schemes such as Training For Work (TFW) and Youth Training (YT) has been devolved to a network of 82 Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in England and Wales and 22 Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in Scotland. They control some £2.5 billion of public funds. Each English TEC is an independent company which enters into an annual contract with the Secretary of State for Employment. The main terms of the contract are outlined in the annual TEC Operating Agreement. This covers such things as the requirement to draw up corporate and business plans, produce annual accounts and collect certain forms of statistical information as well as detailing the programmes (TFW, YT etc.) which must be provided.

TECs can provide training directly but, in practice, they sub-contract their programmes to other providers. These providers can be local authorities, further education colleges, voluntary organisations, companies, private training organisations etc. TECs are responsible for ensuring that these providers deliver good quality training and meet the terms and conditions outlined in their contracts with the Government. The TEC Operating Agreement for 1993/4 states:

Quality Assurance

C41 The TEC shall operate an effective quality assurance system for its Providers of Training, which is:

• either a system under which all the TEC's Providers of Training must obtain and maintain the status of Approved Training Organisations under the Secretary of State's published criteria;

• or is an alternative system approved by the Secretary of State as of equivalent or greater assurance and effectiveness.

C42 The TEC shall ensure that a Provider of Training's agreement terminates if the Provider of Training loses its status, as an Approved Training Organisation, or fails to obtain the required status of an Approved Training Organisation, or fails to reach or maintain an equivalent quality threshold under an alternative approved system.

C43 The TEC shall operate an effective quality system for its Providers of Assessment by drawing up and applying quality assurance criteria which have been approved by the Secretary of State as offering a satisfactory level of assurance and effectiveness. The TEC shall not contract with Providers of Assessment which fail to meet and maintain the quality threshold in the TEC's quality assurance system as agreed by the Secretary of State.

Note 2:
The Leader of Lancashire County Council sits on the Board of ELTEC as does the Chief Executive of Hyndburn Council.

For Immediate Release: 2 November 1993
176/93

COUNCIL REVIEW "DESCENDING INTO FARCE" says MP

The review of local government - masterminded by Skipton and Ripon MP, David Curry - is descending into farce according to his next door neighbour, Pendle's Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP says the review is "wandering all over the shop" in the absence of clear, definitive guidance from the Government. David Curry, the Local Government Minister, tried to give a firm steer last month when he said small district councils were unlikely to be given the go ahead to become new unitary authorities. The Chief Executive of the Local Government Commission - the body charged with the task of drawing up the new local authority map - expects most of the new unitary councils to fall within the 150,000 - 250,000 population range.

The MP said: "This new target figure of up to 250,000 is absolutely horrifying. Local people do not want these monster councils and the cost of the exercise - put by the Commission chairman, John Banham at over £1.1 billion - makes you wonder if the whole thing is worth the candle. I very much doubt it."

"The review has been badly handled and its planning and implementation quite grotesque. On 30 June this year, David Curry told the Commons that there was a move to return West Craven to Yorkshire and that it was up to people there to express what they wanted from the review. Yet the review is being conducted in separate county based areas and on different timetables.

"The Commission has already made recommendations on the review covering North Yorkshire but hasn't started on Lancashire. In fact, the Lancashire review has been stopped dead in its tracks while the Government has another think about things. It's a real dog's dinner!"

more follows

Local Government Review

"I want to see Pendle Council become a unitary authority in its own right - not swallowed up by some newly created frankenstein brought into the world by David Curry."

ends

Note to Editors: The Local Government Commission announces its final recommendations on the counties of Cleveland, Durham and Derbyshire on 8 November. The Commission's original proposal for Cleveland envisaged the abolition of the County Council and the creation of five new unitary authorities including places such as Hartlepool with a population of 89,900 - not so very much more than Pendle's 85,600. The Government has a minimum of six weeks (but no maximum) to consider the report and give its decision.

The Government gave procedure guidance to The Local Government Commission in July 1992 concerning the possible creation of new unitary authorities which straddle the Local Government Review Areas - for example, the Yorkshire/Lancashire border. The guidance provides that

> *where the Commission judges it necessary, at any stage of the review, to make recommendations concerning localities bordering on that area, it should make a formal request to the Secretary of State, with reasons, for a variation in the direction requiring the review to be conducted.*

At no stage did the Local Government Commission request a variation in the Secretary of State's direction on the North Yorkshire Review to include the West Craven area of Lancashire.

For Immediate Release: 2 November 1993
177/93

PENDLE MP CONDEMNS SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS

Those responsible for the bombing in Belfast's Shankhill Road, the slayings in the Rising Sun pub in Greysteel and the wounding of the RUC policeman in Newry have been branded as twisted and evil psychopaths by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"Many people locally have voiced their despair at what is happening. People stop me in the street to talk about it. They have been appalled and sickened - as I have - by what they have seen on their TV screens."

"Ireland cannot move forward while these appalling atrocities continue and politicians across the divide have a duty and a responsibility to find a way of restoring peace and stability to this devastated community."

For Immediate Release: 2 November 1993

178/93

MP CALLS FOR END TO BLOODSHED IN KASHMIR

A call for an immediate end to the bloodletting and atrocities in Kashmir was made by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, at the weekend. The MP was speaking on Sunday evening to a packed meeting of the local Asian community at Nelson's Unity Hall in Vernon Street.

The crisis meeting had been called to discuss the deteriorating situation in Kashmir where the Indian Army is currently laying siege to the Hazratbal mosque - a place of special significance to Moslems as it contains a relic (a hair) of the Prophet Mohammed.

Prentice said: "The whole world has been shocked by the atrocities which are being committed by the Indian Army. Over recent weeks the British Press has been full of spine chilling details of what is happening there. We need to force the Indian authorities to stop the widespread abuses of human rights and to allow free access to Kashmir of Human Rights organisations such as Amnesty International."

"My greatest immediate concern is that the Indian Army does not attempt to storm the Hazratbal mosque which would unleash a terrible reaction. I am urging the British Government to do everything it can to press the Indian Government to call off the siege and to open immediate discussions with the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto."

"The impasse can be broken if India were to agree to hold the plebiscite on Kashmir - allowing the people there to have a say on the form of Government they want - as demanded by the United Nations on two separate occasions. These are all matters I shall be raising with the Foreign Secretary."

"I can well understand the feelings of many people in Pendle who

more follows

are of Asian heritage. This problem of Kashmir has been festering since partition in 1947 but things are now going from bad to worse. Kashmir has been under direct rule from New Dehli since July 1990 - and 11,500 lives have been lost since then and there have been many Press reports of torture and appalling acts of barbarism by the Indian army."

ends

Background note for Editors: Kashmir is the site of a long running dispute between India and Pakistan, which have had rival claims over the territory since the partition of India in 1947. At that time, predominantly Moslem Kashmir was expected to become part of Pakistan. However, as a princely state, its Hindu ruler was allowed to choose his allegiance. After some prevarication, he chose to join India, the predominantly Hindu part of the subcontinent. Part of the state rebelled, however, and came to form the partially autonomous Pakistani state of Azad Kashmir ('free' Kashmir), the remainder being known as the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

As India and Pakistan disputed their respective rights in relation to the area, the UN called for a plebiscite to determine its fate. The two countries agreed in principle, but could not agree over the logistics of such a vote. In 1948, Pakistan invaded Kashmir and war resulted. The ceasefire again provided for a plebiscite, but again it did not take place. In 1965, Pakistani incursions again led to war as India retaliated with an invasion of its own into Pakistan.

In 1972, the settlement of the third Indo-Pakistan war, over East Pakistan/Bangladesh, led to the Simla Agreement. This stipulated that the line of control resulting from the 1971 ceasefire be respected without prejudice to the claims of either side and that 'the two countries are resolved to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them' Pakistan maintains an insistence on upholding UN Resolutions calling for a plebiscite, while India rejects this.

Since 14 October 1993 about 50 people have occupied the important Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar. The Indian army is laying siege to the mosque. The mosque contains a relic of the Prophet Mohammed (a hair) and, in the light of the destruction of the ancient mosque at Ayodhya, northern India, by Hindu militants, any attempt to storm Hazratbal would provoke a fierce reaction.

On 22 October 1993, the Border Security Force opened fire on a crowd of 5,000 unarmed protestors in Bijbehara, south of Srinagar. According to the *Guardian* (25 October 1993), 38 people were killed and several Kashmiri leaders arrested.

For Immediate Release: 3 November 1993
179/93

"POLL TAX ON WHEELS" SET TO BECOME LAW

The controversial Railways Bill privatising British Rail completed its passage through the Commons yesterday (2 November) and is set to become law. The Bill goes back to the Lords today.

The measure - dubbed the poll tax on wheels by former CBI Director General - replaces British Rail with a multiplicity of independent companies and organisations, each with their own objectives.

Speaking at Westminster, local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "No serious commentator believes this Bill is anything other than a recipe for disaster. Instead of one organisation - British Rail - deciding its strategy and priorities we will have a new Regulator, a Franchising Director, the Secretary of State for Transport, Railtrack, up to 25 franchisees, BR as provider of passenger services not yet franchised, an unknown number of independent passenger operators, an unknown number of freight operators, an unknown number of station operators, an unknown number of depot operators, Passenger Transport Authorities and local authorities, the Health and Safety Executive and a Joint Industry Board of franchisees to sort out the apportionment and allocation of ticket revenues between operators. It is a set up of mind boggling complexity."

"And what will happen to our own railway lines in North East Lancashire? Last May, when I raised the matter with the Prime Minister of our very own 20mph puffing billy - run at that speed because of deteriorating track - I was told rail privatisation was the answer. No-one believes that fairy tale."

"Railtrack - the new company which will have ownership and responsibility for railway track and infrastructure (signalling, viaducts, tunnels and so on) will be required to cover its costs -

more follows

including investment costs. Are they going to sink money into our local railway in North East Lancashire? And do we really believe the private sector is going to put money into upgrading our railway lines? I doubt it."

ends

Note to Editors:

1. On 24 May 1993, the Government released details of the second tranche of lines to be put out to franchise. These included North West Regional Railways. BR is currently reorganising itself into the 25 separate shadow franchise areas which are intended to be up and running by April 1994. They will operate for at least six months during which time contracts will be negotiated (and put in place) with the private operators.

On 25 May, Prentice told a packed House of Commons he wanted action to lift the 20mph speed limit for trains on the Nelson to Colne railway line. Prentice told the Commons that trains in his constituency were travelling 9 miles slower than the first ever passenger train in England. "In 1829, George Stephenson's Rocket achieved a speed of 29mph on its journey from Liverpool to Manchester. Now, 164 years later, my local trains are chugging along at a slower speed." Prentice showed MPs a letter from the Chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid, which made it clear the 20mph speed restriction was permanent unless more funding became available from the Government.

2. The late Cabinet Minister and arch proponent of privatisation, Nicholas Ridley, told the London Evening Standard on 30 November last year *'I do not believe it is possible to privatise the railway.'*

For Immediate Release: 2 November 1993
180/93

NO TAX ON READING says PRENTICE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has warned the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to tax reading by imposing a billion pound VAT burden on newspapers, books and magazines.

The MP told Kenneth Clarke that the extension of VAT to the printed word could be the kiss of death to many struggling local newspapers. "The local

press is a vital part of our democracy and anything that weakens it is to be deplored."

"The Government says it wants to promote literacy but how does that objective square with the enormous price hikes that VAT would bring. Ministers are always going on about the three Rs but what, for goodness sake, does it mean in practice? A lot of books are already priced way beyond the reach of many people to the extent that buying a book is now regarded as a luxury rather than a commonplace."

The MP continued: "The Government is clearly intending to extend VAT to things that are currently zero rated in an effort to close the huge £50 billion budget deficit which they themselves created. The temptation to slap VAT on books, newspapers and magazines raising £1.1 billion must be enormous. The Chancellor will do it if he thinks he can get away with it."

Note to Editors: The first unified budget will be on 30 November

For Immediate Release: 3 November 1993
181/93

FLOOD THE HOTLINE!

The National Rivers Authority - the water quality watchdog - is calling on members of the public *"to take a close look at the water environment and report incidents such as pollution, poaching and flooding".*

The NRA wants people to phone them on their new "national emergency" freephone number : 0800 807060 and report any incidents.

The promotional material publicising the new service - launched on Monday of this week - urged all environmentally concerned organisations help protect, rivers, streams, lakes and coastal waters by distributing leaflets and cards giving the new hotline number.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, welcomed the initiative while predicting that the phones in the NRA's North West Regional Office would be red hot before too long as people queued up to ring in.

"Stocks Beck in my own constituency is already heavily polluted to the extent that it cannot support fish life. The NRA has told me it may not be cleaned up before 2005 although they are in discussion with North West Water who are responsible for cleaning things up."

"I shall shortly be meeting the Regional General Manager, Dr Harpley, at Stocks Beck to show him the extent of the pollution and to get a cast iron guarantee that it will be cleaned up *toute suite.* Otherwise I suspect his new hotline will be flooded with complaints."

For Immediate Release: 3 November 1993
182/93

STOP PRESS: LORDS REJECTS RAILWAYS BILL

TO EDITORS: You received by fax at 5pm Press Release headed:

"POLL TAX ON WHEELS" SET TO BECOME LAW

It stated the Railways Bill had completed its passage through Parliament. It had in fact completed its passage through the Commons yesterday and went back to the Lords today.

The Lords rejected key amendments and the Bill will now come back to the Commons.

For Immediate Release: 9 November 1993
183/93

CROWN POST OFFICES "AN ENDANGERED SPECIES" says MP

Crown Post Offices are fast disappearing and will soon become objects of curiosity says local MP, Gordon Prentice. Shock figures unearthed by the Pendle MP show the number of Crown Post Offices nationwide shrinking by over 40% since 1987/8.

Over the UK as a whole, the number of Crown Post Offices has plummeted from 1499 in 1987/8 to 881 last month. In Lancashire over the same period we have gone from 23 to 14. And here in Pendle we are down from three to one - in Nelson and that is now under threat. It is a policy of contraction - by stealth."

Prentice said: "These figures demonstrate what many of us have long suspected. There is a concerted effort - encouraged by the Government - to dismantle the Post Office as a prelude to privatisation."

"Post Office Counters is currently considering objections to the proposed downgrading of Nelson Crown Post Office and its transfer to an agency. When I objected to this move I was told by the Post Office that *"every effort will be made to ensure that anyone wishing to remain with Post Office Counters would be redeployed on their present grade at another office".* Given the huge contraction in the number of Crown Post Offices where exactly are the jobs that are going begging elsewhere in the system?"

"Last year the Post Office made £247m and over the past decade it has contributed £750m to the Treasury. The Post Office is a successful organisation and should be left well alone to get on with the job of serving the public."

Note to Editors:

1. On 27 July, the Pendle MP presented a 8,000+ petition to 10 Downing Street from his constituents protesting against the threat to Sub Post Offices from the introduction of Automated Credit Transfer. One person in eight of Pendle's adult population of 65,000 had written to the MP or signed the petitions protesting about the Government's threat to local post offices.

more follows

Post Office threat

2. The number of Crown Post Offices is shown in the table:

Crown Post Offices

	Pendle	Lancashire	UK
1987/88	3	23	1499
1988/89	3	23	1493
1989/90	3	20	1339
1990/91	1	17	1167
1991/92	1	16	1019
1992/93	1	15	917
October 93	1	14	881

For Immediate Release: 9 November 1993
184/93

PENDLE MP RIDICULES "PICK'N'MIX" LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

The local government map of England is in danger of becoming a confusing patchwork quilt of councils of hugely divergent populations exercising different functions according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was speaking at Westminster following the publication yesterday of the Local Government Commission's final recommendations to Government on the proposed future shape of local Government in Cleveland, Durham and Derbyshire - the first tranche of county and district councils to be reviewed.

Last month, Local Government Minister, David Curry, put a stop to the review of Lancashire while his Environment Department formulated new guidance on how the Commission should approach its task.

Prentice said: "The Commission is recommending the abolition of the County Council in Cleveland and the creation of four unitary authorities (exercising all the local government functions) on existing borough council boundaries. In Durham and in Derbyshire they basically want to see the continuation of the two tier County/District structure although, in Durham, Darlington gets unitary status and in Derbyshire there are two new unitary councils, one based on Derby City and the other bringing together Chesterfield, Bolsover and North East Derbyshire. Heavens knows what people are supposed to make of this hotch potch."

"No-one knows which way the Government is going to jump on this and I suspect they don't know either. If Hartlepool is confirmed as a unitary authority by the Government then why on earth can't we have a unitary authority here in Pendle where our population falls only a few thousand short of Hartlepool's."

For Immediate Release: 9 November1993
185/93

SUNDAY SHOPPING BACKED BY MP

The Bill to clear up the law on Sunday trading is likely to be put before Parliament later this month. It will end years of confusion and anomalies that have characterised the law on Sunday shopping.

On 13 July, the Government published its draft Sunday Trading Bill which, unusually, sets out four options for regulating Sunday opening hours. These range from almost total prohibition (along the lines promoted by the Keep Sunday Special Campaign) through to total deregulation.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I have had an enormous postbag on this issue and I think it's safe to say that most people who have been in touch with me favour some kind of change. I broadly support the proposals put forward by the Shopping Hours Reform Council which would allow Sunday trading - but for a specified number of hours."

"The main shopworkers union, USDAW, has now withdrawn its objections to Sunday trading and - along with the other trade unions that organise in the retail sector - is concentrating all its energies on the employee protection issues."

"The Government is allowing Tory MPs a free vote on the principle of Sunday trading but, typically, the whip will come on again when the clauses on employee protection are debated. As far as I am concerned, shopworkers rights are absolutely central to the whole debate and must be fully safeguarded. No-one should be forced to work on a Sunday if she or he doesn't want to. But for those who do choose to work on Sundays, there should be premium pay."

For Immediate Release: 16 November1993
186/93

MP CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION TO BOOST NURSERY PROVISION

News this week that the Government has ruled out universal nursery provision from the age of three has infuriated local MP, Gordon Prentice. The Pendle MP wants nursery education made available for all three and four year olds whose parents want it.

At the weekend, Education Secretary, John Patten, pigeonholed the plea for more nursery places made by the independent National Commission on Education. He said it would cost too much.

Prentice said: "It is difficult to believe now that when Margaret Thatcher was Secretary of State for Education in 1972 she said "nursery education should be available without charge... to those children of three and four whose parents wish them to benefit from it." Twenty one years later - and after a continuous run of 14 years of Tory Government - we are still hundreds of thousands of

places short. Indeed, in January 1991, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clarke dismissed Mrs Thatcher's pledge as "a mistake".

"Here in Pendle I want to see a massive expansion of provision - but this can only come with extra Government help. Lancashire makes provision for 50% of three and four year olds and is just above the national average (49%). We reach a higher percentage of under fives than they do next door in North Yorkshire but I take no comfort from that. The nation must do much more.

"The West Craven area needs more help but the criteria laid down by the County Council quite properly steers resources into those parts of the Borough which are most deprived. No-one would disagree with this policy. It is manifestly fair. But why should the County Council be forced into making this choice in the first place? We need additional resources from Central Government so that children across the Borough can benefit."

"There are those who attempt to point score on this issue and that really gets us nowhere. It is easy to mention the Liberal Democrat controlled Isle of Wight which makes provision for 38% of three and four year olds. Or the Lib Dem controlled London Borough of Sutton at 37% or the Lib Dem London Borough of Richmond on Thames at 44%. But trading statistics at this level doesn't get us very far." (Jan 92 figures throughout. The most recent available).

The MP continued: "We have to give nursery provision the priority it deserves. And that means moving away from a Government policy which says that public funds should primarily go to children in need because of health or social difficulties. I say, without reservation, that public funds should be used to help provide places for all children."

Secondly, we must press the Government to take immediate action to ease the financial strait-jacket which stops Lancashire County Council - and others like it - providing all the places necessary to meet the demand. It is quite ludicrous that local education authorities cannot build nursery schools - which is non statutory provision - except at the expense of some other educational priority."

ends

Notes to Editors:

Note 1: The following letter to local MP, Gordon Prentice, is from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, John Bowis MP, and sets out the Government's position. Prentice had pressed the Government for clarification of the Government's policies towards the under fives.

> John Bowis MP writes: "It is not always easy for parents to reconcile employment with family commitments. We believe that parents who wish to take up employment when their children are young should make their own arrangements for childcare including meeting the costs. Central Government's role is to ensure that all children services, including those used by parents who decide to combine employment with family commitments, are properly regulated and of acceptable quality. Local people and organisations should decide the pattern and level of services for their area.

Local authorities have a duty to provide appropriate day care for children in need. Public funds for day care should be targeted on children in need because of health or social difficulties. It is not right to use the taxpayers' money to subsidise the childcare costs incurred by all parents.

The Department has a long tradition of grant aiding voluntary organisations active in the childcare sector. Ten national voluntary organisations receive some £1.3m in grant aid towards their core costs and for national projects from this Department. We also run a small grants scheme, now in its seventh year of operation, under which seven national voluntary organisations give small capital grants to local groups to help them expend or develop their services. The Department is also spending £1.5m over three years to pump prime an expansion of day care services for school age children. These programmes all help to expand childcare services.

In response to the increasing demand for out of school childcare, the Department of Employment have introduced a £45m programme to increase the number of childcare services for school age children outside school hours. It will help with the setting up costs of projects and, where necessary, running costs for the first year. The overall aim of this programme is to extend parental choices about work and training and give them the chance to participate in the labour market. It is hoped that this money will create some 50,000 additional out-of-school places over the next three years. Training and Enterprise Councils are implementing the programme at local level. For example, they will set up local partnerships with other bodies such as employers, voluntary organisations, local authorities, parents and schools.

The Government encourages employers to develop family friendly personnel policies. More employers are now interested in adopting such policies to help parents reconcile employment with their family responsibilities. They will examine a range of options, childcare, flexible working arrangements, career breaks and leave arrangements. They may identify a business case for help with childcare costs because this can improve staff recruitment, retention and career development of staff. The NHS, the largest employer of women in Europe, illustrates what can be achieved. There are now a number of nurseries for NHS staff and agreements on such matters as parental leave and the use of childcare vouchers."

Note 2: In July 1992, the Pendle MP blasted the Government for "fiddling" the way in which cash is earmarked for the under fives. He alleged that £43m in Government grants had gone to 30,000 non existent nursery places in six conservative controlled counties. “This fiddling and diddling really makes my blood boil. In contrast, there are six Labour controlled county councils which provide 27,000 more nursery places at a cost of £39.3m for which they receive no Government grant whatsoever.”

“Here in Lancashire where there is still tremendous unmet demand for nursery places, the county council is providing 1,908 **more** nursery places than the Government believes it should. This costs £2.8m and the Government doesn’t pay a penny towards this. Next door in North Yorkshire, the county council provides 1,402 **fewer** places than they should.”

“The whole grant system is rigged to favour local authorities for whom the under fives are an afterthought. County councils such as Lancashire that are trying to do their bit are unfairly penalised."

Note 3: This is an extract from the Labour Party's Education Green Paper published in October 1993.

"We have to make nursery provision not only a right but a practical possibility for all children. The prevailing pattern of nursery provision which offers two and a half hours in a nursery class is often totally impractical for many parents. Nursery education is denied to many who rely on public transport. In many areas parents just cannot deliver a child to a nursery at 9.00 am, return home and do anything useful before having to return to collect the child. This means that nursery provision has to be integrated into forms of childcare. There is a clear need for comprehensive provision and better integration of voluntary and statutory sectors.

The lack of national urgency in Britain has led to a confusing array of services in both childcare and education for under fives. Whilst each service has an important part to play in the general delivery of choice, they are very fragmented. At the moment, services for the under fives include: nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools, day-care nurseries, pre-school play groups, child minders, family centres, out-of-school hours provision in schools, play groups. work place nurseries, nannies and a very wide range of support from families and friends. Such a range comes under the administrative control of many different central and local government departments: the Department for Education; the Department of Health; the Department of National Heritage; the Home Office; the Department of Employment; local education authorities, local authority social services departments and local authority leisure departments. The provisions will be organised by many statutory, voluntary and private organisations. Many of them have to operate with little knowledge of the developments in each other's work.

Alongside this fragmentation of provision, we must underline the fact that there is a substantial level of unsatisfied demand for each service whether supported from private or government sources. Labour has a variety of proposals for developing these services - all of them call for greater planning responsibility for government.

It is difficult to consider pre-school educational provision separately from other childcare provision for children under five. Ideally, all childcare provision should have an educational content. however informal it may appear to be. At the moment early years provision in England is diverse. of variable quality and involves statutory voluntary and private agencies.

- Nursery education: schools and classes run by local education authorities with most three - and four - year-old children attending five half-day sessions. About 35% of three - and four-year-old children experience nursery education. although this ranges from none in some local authorities to nearly 80% in others .

- Reception classes: almost 80% of four-year-old children are admitted to primary school reception classes. mainly as full-timers before the age

of five. Yet. there is a significant difference between the educational needs of a child who is four years old and those of a child just one year older. The growing practice of just one entry point for the school year means that some children enter primary school just after their fourth birthday and this is causing some concern.

• Day nurseries: take children of all ages under five for the length of the adult working day. They are run by local authorities (usually social services departments), voluntary organisations, community groups, employers or private companies or individuals as a business. Most are in the private sector and children can attend full- or part-time.

• Playgroups: mainly run by parents or community groups with a few paid staff. More than 70% belong to the Pre-school Playgroup Association. Many offer at least four sessions to children aged between two and a half and five. Over 40% of three and four year-olds attend a PPA affiliate.

•Childminders: provide a year round working day service, normally in their homes, for children under five (and very frequently after school for over-fives). This is normally a private arrangement between parents and childminders, though occasionally local authorities and employers sponsor childminders.

The most recent general information dates back to 1986 when the UK General Household Survey showed that 42% of children used these services. Access ranged from 6% of under-ones to 76% of three year olds and 89% of four year olds. Overall playgroups were the most widely used type of provision. This also applied to three year olds; but for four year olds it was schools.

It has to be emphasised that most of this provision is part-time. In most playgroups children attend less than 10 hours a week and most children in nursery education attend five part-time sessions. Also, over half the places provided (playgroups and childminders) are under-resourced. In addition, the reception class places for four year olds are often an inappropriate provision for children of that age.

There is clearly huge room for improving provision for children under five in traditional educational services as well as for high-quality day-care services, to meet the demands of recent developments in working and living patterns.

The Government has remained content to broadcast the value of nursery education in the hope that private providers will fill the substantial gaps in provision. Most of all the Government hoped that employers would provide this service. They have not. Fewer than 5% of employers contribute towards their employees' childcare costs and only 3% of employers provide workplace nurseries.

Nearly 45% of mothers of children under five are at work and an even greater proportion of mothers with older children. Yet there is very little provision of childcare to cover working hours. The private provision is usually too expensive for low income families and employers tend to lack flexibility over working arrangements for parents with young children.

Whilst there is a broad range of services, the spread and quality of services are inconsistent. The Audit Commission says these are the most variable of local services. A Government lead is needed to give coherence and quality for this breadth of provision.

A divided service

Two different departments at national level~ the Department of' Health and the Department for Education. have responsibility for the management of services for young children. The Health Department has responsibility for social service-based provision (for example. day nurseries. playgroups and the regulation of childminders), and the Education Department for pre-school education. They do not plan together, budget together. or provide comparable statistics. The discussions around the Children Act recognised these problems. but the legislation failed to take some of the critical steps necessary to overcome them.

These divisions are mirrored at local level. Services for young children are split between education and social service departments (with out-of-school care often being funded through recreation departments as well as providers outside the publicly funded system. This creates confusion when new services are being initiated. Employers and independent providers often do not know whom to ask for advice, or what regulations they must follow.

The result of such confusion means that services often overlap and there are large gaps where there are no services at all. Today, there are several kinds of education and social service part-time provision, covering children under three as well as opportunities for out-of-school activities for school age children.

Building on best practice

Within this incoherent underfunded network of services there has developed some excellent practice. Because they have been faced with so very little central government support, parents have constructed an imaginative network of friends, relatives. education and play group support. But for so many people this is a fragile solution. Almost all full-time provision that meets the needs of working parents is in the private and voluntary sector. Whilst private provision may be available, it is often too expensive for families on low incomes. This therefore creates a poverty trap which excludes some women from working.

Most part-time provision is also self-funded. This often means a dependence upon lowpaid staff or volunteers, and premises which are sometimes less than satisfactory. Only nursery education is relatively well resourced in terms of staffing, premises and other support. The proportion of children in this provision varies from area to area. from 17% to 93%. Those who provide and manage the services have been given no guidance on who should pay for early childhood services, and how the costs should he split between parents. employers and local and central government.

Inspection and monitoring procedures differ depending on who manages the service. The inspection may be extremely thorough and include a range of criteria, or it may be no more than a half hour visit. We cannot enter the 21 st century with such a fragile programme of provision for education and

childcare. Government must take responsibility to ensure the provision of a coherent but flexible service and common standards.

Central Government

Should there be a single central government department providing unification for the service? Should this be the Department for Education or the Department of Health as the lead Ministry? We are most interested in people's ideas about this. This would include all services for under-fives and all out-of-school scheme.s for school age children.

There is an even wider question that needs discussion. At the moment there is a universal service for children and parents of very young children the health visitor services. This excellent NHS service not only ensures that children - all children - are developing correctly at u very early age but it also ensures that parents are given detailed help with parenting in their own home. Then at the age of six months this stops should this continue? And how should this service from the primary health care team be properly linked in with the education and care service outlined in this section?

National targets for us all to aim for

Should there be national and local targets for provision and if so what should these be? The European Commission Childcare Network has recommended the following targets:

- a belief that *every* child has the right to childcare
- full - time flexible provision in education and day care for 70% of three to four year-olds
- provision for 5 - 10% of children under three in child care
- out of school provision for 10 - 15% of children under 10.

The role of the Local Authority

The importance of local accountability and local democracy runs through all of Labour's policies. We belive that every service development needs to take place ion a form that will encourage some aspect of local accountability. The same is true for nursery education and childcare. Local authorities will be required to designate a lead department at local level. Should this always be the education department? The department at local level should assume responsibility for the management of all existing public services to young children and out-of-school services. We believe that this lead department should consult widely with all sectors and interest groups top produce a plan showing how the local targets will be met. The plans must involve the voluntary and independent sector as one of the major providers. The way in which local and national subsidy should be provided is a matter for consideration in the discussion following this Green Paper.

Getting the staff and training them well

There will have to be a considerable expansion of staff and their training. At the moment the different staff are trained under very different sets of arrangements. These need reform. Nursery teachers play workers nursery nurses and other childcare workers all have very different systems of training and qualification. How should these he reorganised? A modular system of qualifications would allow very much greater transferability. Is this the best way forward? If so how do we ensure the protection of the professionalism of

the highly-qualified nursery teachers who are the key to quality pre-school education.

Setting new standards

At the moment there is a very wide variety of different safeguards in services. How should these he better organised? Should this be the activity of a single central government department or should it be an independent body such as the local Government Quality Commission.

One means of guaranteeing an expansion of nursery education would be to lower the .school starting age and have some compulsory part-time education before the age of five. This approach is especially favoured by some where there is a low amount of provision in nursery education This would require the establishment of very many more nursery classes in schools or new nursery schools - probably integrated in early years or under-five centres. There would of course have to be a recognition of the difference between nursery teaching and the reception classes in primary schools as mentioned above.

An alternative approach favoured by some parents would be to raise the school starting age to six and to guarantee all children two year's full time kindergarten. We believe that most five year olds are ready and adjust well to full time education in primary schools. With a more comprehensive system of pre-school provision all of our children would get the best start, but we think it right to acknowledge the alternative approaches.

For Immediate Release: 9 November 1993
187/93

PENDLE MP IN TALKS WITH SPANISH REGIONAL PRESIDENT

A massive transfer of power from Westminster and Whitehall to the English regions will be a top priority for an incoming Labour Government after the next General Election, Says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was speaking at Westminster yesterday following a meeting with Sr Jose Bono Martinez, President of the Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha and a leading member of the Spanish Socialist Party.

The MP said: "I had a valuable opportunity to speak to Sr Bono and pick his brains about regional government in Spain which was set up after the end of the Franco dictatorship when Spain turned to democracy. An enormous amount of work that we do at Westminster directly concerns the regions and should be left to them. There is enough for central government to do in the areas of foreign and defence policy, social security, economic policy and the rest without poking its nose into matters which could best be decided by the regions themselves."

"I also showed Sr Bono around the Palace of Westminster and a look of incredulity transformed his face as I described the composition and workings of the House of Lords. People from abroad are always staggered when they hear that two thirds of the Palace of Westminster is given over to the unelected peers who are there by patronage or birth."

Note to Editors: Sr Bono was invited to Britain as a guest of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. His main interest is the relationship between the regions and central government. He is also interested in the creation of National Parks. He has set up a project (Toledo 2000) to restore and renovate ancient buildings in Toledo.

For Immediate Release: 16 November 1993
188/93

MP BLASTS "GOVERNMENT COMPLACENCY" OVER FLU EPIDEMIC

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says the Government is guilty of "appalling complacency" in failing to ensure adequate stocks of vaccine were available to protect vulnerable people against the potentially deadly Beijing Influenza A Strain.

In a letter to Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, the MP says a number of extremely distressed elderly people were in contact with him after being told by their GPs that no vaccine was available. "It is simply unacceptable for vulnerable people to be told they cannot be protected against this virulent strain of flu when the authorities were aware of its presence a year ago."

The MP's letter reads: "I see from a Press Release issued by your own Department on 4 November that the Government's Chief Medical Officer stated quite unequivocally that sufficient influenza vaccine was being made available to meet the demand to protect vulnerable groups in the community. Dr Kenneth Calman has clearly not been to North East Lancashire where elderly vulnerable people are still unprotected."

Prentice is pressing the Health Secretary to make supplies of the vaccine available at the earliest possible moment.

For Immediate Release: 16 November 1993
189/93

NORWEB CHALLENGES PENDLE MP ON CHARTER MARK JIBE

The privatised electricity monopoly NORWEB has been stung into responding to the jibe by local MP, Gordon Prentice, that its Charter Mark award was "preposterous".

The Chairman of the company's Charter Mark Team has invited the MP to discuss his concerns with the company and meet the people working in the customer services operation.

Prentice said: "I will certainly be taking up this invitation and I will be looking forward to it immensely. When I said last month that the Charter Mark was an award of doubtful value I meant every word of it. At precisely the moment when the Government was urging pay restraint, NORWEB's Chairman, Kenneth Harvey, saw his pay increase by £23,644 to £208,287. Only two years before, his pay stood at £62,270."

"NORWEB's pre-tax profits zoomed up by 96.2% from 1990/1 - 1991/2 when the average increase across the twelve electricity companies was 27.3%. MANWEB came next with a 60.2% increase. All the others were below 30%."

"No-one really knows how these Charter Mark awards are made" said the MP.

Note to Editors: On 5 November, the Open Government Minister, William Waldegrave MP, told Prentice that "in 1993, 411 Charter Mark applications were received from organisations throughout the public sector and the privatised utilities. 93 awards were made to those organisations that demonstrated evidence of the highest levels of service to their customers. In 1992, 296 organisations submitted applications, and 36 awards were made."

The Pendle MP has waged a long running campaign against the company. In June 1992, Prentice urged the President of the Board of Trade to take immediate action to curb the company's "runaway profits". The MP told

more follows

Michael Heseltine: "This company has an extortionate record in extracting cash from its customers. In April 1991, Norweb put up its standing charges by 18 per cent to £20.88p - the highest increase in England. The price for each unit of electricity went up by 9%. At the time this cost my constituents £884,331 - or £27 for each household in Pendle."

The Pendle MP also attacked the inflated salaries the generous share options the Norweb Directors had awarded themselves. Prentice told Michael Heseltine: "Kenneth Harvey (the Chairman) has 108,080 share options and his fellow directors have half as much each. They can exercise their right to buy shares under the Executive Share Option Scheme for £3.11 between February 1994 and February 2001. In July 1991, The Mail on Sunday estimated that this represented a profit at that date of £51,198 for Kenneth Harvey. Their estimate of the long term value of his share options was £333,448.

In July last year, Prentice accused Norweb of demanding huge advance payments from struggling local firms - for electricity they hadn't yet used. The MP claimed cash was being extorted from ailing firms who said the inflated bills would make the difference between surviving and going under in the current recession.

The MP took the matter up with OFFER - the electricity watchdog - and the Company subsequently backed down. The MP told OFFER that over the previous four years, electricity profits had shot up by 150% while inflation had gone up 31%. A sum equal to £58 excess profits for every Norweb customer. Over the period since electricity privatisation was announced in 1986, Norweb's standing charges had gone up by 64% - the biggest increase in the whole country.

For Immediate Release: 16 November 1993
190/93

ELTEC's RESERVES ZOOM TO £3.4m

ELTEC - the Training and Enterprise Council responsible for promoting training in the North East Lancashire - had reserves of £3.4m at the end of the 1992/3 financial year compared with £2.0m the year before. Within the £3.4m, £875,000 had been specifically set aside to *"provide for the underpinning of support facilities to ensure that corporate objectives are met."* After taxation, ELTEC's surplus was £1.3m.

A fortnight ago, the MP claimed that some of the Training and Enterprise Councils were acting more like Post Offices or Savings Banks rather than spending all the money they had on spearheading the nation's training effort.

The MP's outspoken remarks followed disclosures from the National Audit Office which showed Training and Enterprise Councils holding more than £200m cash in the bank at a time when the Chancellor was preparing to cut back on public spending. The Pendle MP was also sharply critical of the lack of accountability of the 82 TECs which between them control £2.5 billion of public funds. Since then, the CBI has also spoken out in favour of greater accountability.

Note to Editors: At the beginning of November, the MP launched a probe on the quality and organisation of local training. He has tabled a series of Parliamentary questions on the organisation and finances of the Training and Enterprise Councils.

For Immediate Release: 18 November 1993
191/93

FALL IN PENDLE JOBLESS

The number of Pendle people unemployed in October and claiming benefit has fallen to 2,783 compared with 3,065 the month before. The jobless rate stands at 7.4% (September 8.1%) - below the UK average of 9.9%.

Nationwide, unemployment last month dropped to 2,793,596 a fall of 118,534 since the beginning of the year.

Vacancies in the two local job centres at Colne and Nelson have picked up and are broadly in line with the position in October 92.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Our unemployment in Pendle is now lower than at any time since December 1991 - but still 1,075 higher than the level the Prime Minister inherited from Margaret Thatcher in November 1990. That's hardly a record to cheer about."

"I hope this is the beginning of a sustainable trend and not another blip in the graph. And, of course, we take these figures for what they are - massaged and manipulated to the extent they bear little resemblance to the true picture of unemployment in the area."

Note to Editors: Pendle Job Watch Graph follows. It is an established fact that the unemployment statistics are manipulated and massaged to keep the jobless totals down. We have this on the authority of the former Conservative Employment Minister, Alan Clark MP, who, in his recent Diaries, detailed the

inducements given to people to leave the unemployment register. The list below is taken from the Financial Times of 20 May 1993 (*"Measures which obscured the extent of joblessness"*). It was reproduced alongside the April 1993 Pendle Job Watch.

November 1981: New rate of supplementary benefit introduced for men over 60 who had been on supplementary benefit for more than a year. No longer required to sign on as available for work in order to receive the benefit. Estimated to have removed 37,000 men from the claimant count over the ensuing year.

October 1982: Registration at Jobcentres becomes voluntary. Count at Jobcentres no longer provided a meaningful measure of unemployment so

basis of unemployment statistics switched to count of claimants at unemployment benefit offices. This cut the count by 190,000 as a result of more up-to-date record-keeping (-78,000), the exclusion of registrants not claiming benefit (-135,000), and inclusion of the severely disabled (+23,000).

Budget 1983: About 162,000 men, mainly over 60, allowed to receive national insurance credits or the higher long term rate of supplementary benefit without needing to attend an unemployment benefit office.

September 1988: The Social Security Act changed the benefit entitlements of under 18s, removing an estimated 90,000 from the headline total.

July 1989: Redundant Mineworkers Payment Scheme changed so that people covered by the scheme no longer need to sign on as unemployed and available for work in order to receive scheme benefits - 15,500 estimated to have left the count As a result.

October 1989: Social Security Act makes receipt of benefit conditional on claimants proving they are actively seeking work. It also provideed that after a permitted period the level of remuneration will not be good cause for claimants turning down or failing to take advantage of an employment opportunity. Unemployment Unit calculates this led to a fall of 50,000 on the monthly count.

December 1989: Changes in the way earnings affect unemployment benefit. Part-time or casual workers earning enough to pay national insurance contributions in any week denied unemployment benefit for the week. Unemployment Unit estimates this led to fall of 30,000 in count.
Source: Department of Employment and Unemployment Unit

For Immediate Release: 18 November 1993
193/93

PENDLE MP SLAMS QUEEN'S SPEECH

The Government's legislative plans for the new Parliamentary session have been blasted by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster after the Queen's Speech, the Pendle MP said: "The prejudices of the Tory backwoods MPs were on parade today. There is an emphasis on law and order but who allowed the crime rate to more than double since 1979? They want to do something about child pornography. Quite right! But why has it taken them so long to act?"

"After 14 years, the Tories' fingerprints are over every aspect of our national life. Every child at school has been educated under a Tory Government yet they blame everybody but themselves. Every clogged up road and every clapped out train is their responsibility after 14 years at the helm. And the coal industry - now being lined up for privatisation - is the merest shadow of its former self."

"One of the very few bright spots was the absence of any commitment to privatise the Post Office - or parts of it such as Parcelforce. The Tories were shocked by the reaction to their plans earlier in the year to cut back on support for Sub Post Offices, a lifeline for many in the community" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 18 November 1993
194/93

KEEP PENDLE LOCAL says MP

Pendle Council should become a unitary authority in its own right - delivering all local authority services to local people - according to the area's MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was responding to reports last week which suggest the West Craven area should be carved out of Pendle and returned to Yorkshire on redrawn local government boundaries.

"I believe the majority of people in Pendle identify with the local authority which, I believe, does a very good job in very difficult circumstances. I do not want to see my constituents who live in West Craven dumped into a new remote authority stretching over to Harrogate where services will undoubtedly be poorer and patchier."

"And I set my face completely against suggestions that we should subsume Pendle into some enormous East Lancashire authority with a population of half a million plus. Who needs it? And who wants it?"

"Local government should be just that - local. The Government is pouring money down the drain in an ill-conceived local government reorganisation that is coming apart at the seams before our very eyes. The current review has already cost over £3m but the real cost is in the frustration and anger felt by people whose views are being ignored."

Note to Editors: The Chairman of the Local Government Commission, John Banham, has estimated the cost of the proposed local government reorganisation in England at over £1.1 billion.

For Immediate Release: 23 November 1993
195/93

MP URGES GOVERNMENT TO ACT ON SEAT BELTS FOR SCHOOL MINI BUSES

All school mini buses should be fitted with seat belts - and the Government should underwrite the cost says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Last month the MP wrote to Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, saying the Government should ensure seat belts were fitted in all school transport. The Roads Minister, Robert Key, told the Pendle MP on 20 October *"Many thousands of children travel to school each day in coaches, buses and minibuses, which remain the safest form, of road transport in this country, considerably safer in fact than other means of transport, including private cars. The local education authority, or governing body of a school, can stipulate that all buses used should have seat belts, but in reality few do so."*

Prentice commented: "Since receiving this letter, we have seen the terrible tragedy which claimed the lives of twelve children from Hagley RC High School. I want to see schools everywhere fitting their minibuses with seat belts. This is also the view of the Roads Minister who says it is open to LEAs and governing bodies to have them fitted."

"I am urging all my local schools to fit seat belts right away. And I have written to the Education Secretary to ask for additional resources to be made available to the schools to offset the cost."

For Immediate Release: 23 November 1993
196/93

PRENTICE DUBS JOHN MAJOR "A COMPLETE HYPOCRITE"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice has dubbed John Major "a complete and unashamed hypocrite" following reports in yesterday's Daily Express claiming the Prime Minister was launching a drive to give every three year old a place in a nursery school.

In a savage attack on the Prime Minister, the Pendle MP said: "You would have to be simple minded to believe this rot that is now being trotted out. John Major has been Prime Minister for three years now and if nursery schools were so important why have we never heard him speak out before now?"

"The fact is that Margaret Thatcher promised - twenty one years ago - nursery places for all three and four year olds whose parents wanted it. That pledge never saw the light of day and now it is being resurrected before a blinking, disbelieving public."

"Let the Tories put their money where their PR strategy now is. If they now think nursery education is important they should do something about it. Given the history of this pledge, it was grotesque to see the Daily Express trumpet that *"Despite objections from the cash strapped Treasury, the Prime Minister is convinced the move will be a big vote winner at the next election".* The man's brass neck is awesome" said Prentice.

Note to Editors: Express Political Editor, Jon Craig, wrote this front page "Exclusive" - **NURSERY SCHOOLS FOR ALL. Major aims to give every child of three a place in the classroom.** The story continues: *"A drive to give every three year old a place in nursery school has been launched by John Major. His plan, creating up to a million places, could be the biggest schools revolution this century..."*

For Immediate Release: 24 November 1993
197/93

PENDLE MP URGES PRIME MINISTER TO CARPET CURRY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging the Prime Minister to upbraid the Local Government Minister, David Curry, for using his position to influence the shape of the new local government map in North Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Prentice, whose constituency lies alongside David Curry's Skipton and Ripon, has asked the Prime Minister to rule on the protocol of having the Minister with day to day responsibility for local government reorganisation making explicit statements in the local press on what is - or is not - likely to be acceptable.

"Mr Curry told the Craven Herald last week the Local Government Commission's proposed merger of Craven and Harrogate was *"a dead duck"*. He said York was *"virtually certain to get its own all purpose council and Harrogate is big enough at least to be able to put up a good case to manage its own affairs".* He then goes on to propose the merger of Craven Council in Yorkshire and Ribble Valley in Lancashire saying their respective County identities would not suffer.

"A few months ago he seemed to be suggesting that West Craven in Pendle should be reabsorbed into Yorkshire on the County's pre-1974 boundaries. Now, with the passage of a few months, he has come up with the brainwave of marrying Craven and Ribble Valley - and to heck with the County boundary."

"The Minister's statements include the caveat that he is speaking as the local MP and not as the Local Government Minister but he is the man who answers for the detail of the reorganisation in the Commons. He is the Minister who speaks for the Government when quizzed by the Environment Select Committee on the small print of the local government review. Is it therefore right for him

more follows

to pre-empt the final recommendations of the Local Government Commission on North Yorkshire - due in January - and to say what is and what is not going to be acceptable?"

"A lot of people desperate to detect evidence of coherence in the Minister's statements will conclude, as I have, he is talking a load of tripe."

ends

Note to Editors: On 30 June this year, the Minister told the Commons that "West Craven, in Yorkshire has been put into Lancashire for reasons that - speaking as a Yorkshire Member - are always incomprehensible, but there is a move to return it to Yorkshire. It is up to people to express what they want from the review..."

For Immediate Release: 23 November 1993
198/93

CLEVELAND GUEST CALLS IN RECEIVER

Colne Engineering firm, Cleveland Guest, is calling in the receiver. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who heard the shock news today (Tuesday, 23 November), launched a scathing attack on the Prime Minister at question time in the Commons.

Speaking to a packed Commons Chamber, the local MP said the Prime Minister had written to him as recently as 29 July 1993 specifically mentioning Cleveland Guest and wishing them well.

Prentice said: "This firm operates at the leading edge of aerospace engineering and I quizzed the PM last June about delays in the Tornado Al Yamamah contract which were worrying the firm. The following month I received an assurance from the Prime Minister that the contract was signed, sealed and delivered. He then went on to wish the firm well."

"I told the PM straight that every time he sends his good wishes to a manufacturing company it's the kiss of death. The news that the receiver is to be brought in is another tragedy for our local manufacturing and skills base - and for the people of Colne."

"The people who work at Cleveland Guest are not making beer mats. They are highly skilled engineers with irreplaceable skills. I shall be doing everything I possibly can to save the company and find a buyer."

Prentice concluded: "From the information now available to me it is as plain as a pikestaff the company has been sailing through some very choppy financial waters. Many questions need to be asked about the management and direction of this company but my top priority is to save the jobs of the people who work there. That's the bottom line."

Note to Editors: Cleveland Guest are precision engineers manufacturing components for the aerospace and other industries. Its holding company is

more follows

Habit PLC who manufacture and sell piston rings, diamond tools and specialist services in the precision engineering and construction industries. Its Swedish parent is Darcos Holding AB (Sweden). In December 1991 it had generated sales of over £6.1m over the previous 17 months. At that date it employed 183 people.

Cleveland Guest's ICC (Inter Company Comparison) score compares the company with 197 in the same industrial sector. (100 ranks good and 1 ranks poor.) Cleveland Guest scored 6. ICC (a financial information service - much the same as Reuters is a news service) recommended recently that guarantees be sought before trade credit was granted to the company. The parent company, Habit, had a ICC score of 12 in 1991 and ICC suspended the credit rating as Companies House showed the latest accounts were filed as at 31 December 1991.

For Immediate Release: 24 November 1993
199/93

TRADE UNIONISTS LOBBY MPs ON COLLAPSE OF MANUFACTURING

Trade unionists from all over the North West lobbied MPs at Westminster today to draw attention to the collapse of manufacturing industry in the region.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, met a delegation from the Rolls Royce plant at Barnoldswick who expressed concern about job losses in aerospace. Only 24 hours before, the shock news came through that Colne based precision engineering firm, Cleveland Guest, was calling in the receiver.

Prentice said: "The unions have prepared a report on manufacturing in the North West which makes chilling reading. On the Government's own figures, over 88,000 manufacturing jobs in the region were lost between January 1992 and March this year - a contraction which cannot be allowed to continue."

The MP said he would be pressing for a Supply Day debate on the future of manufacturing in the North West.

For Immediate Release: 24 November 1993
200/93

PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY INQUIRY

The Parliamentary Boundary Commission Inquiry into the Lancashire constituencies opens on Monday 29 November 1993 at 10.30am in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Preston. It is open to members of the public.

The Commission's provisional recommendations include the reduction in the number of Lancashire seats from 16 to 15 (to take account of falling population) and the enlargement of the Pendle constituency to include the Ribble Valley wards of Read, Sabden and Simonstone.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I shall be putting forward the case for the status quo as far as Pendle is concerned. We have an identifiable community and although our towns have their distinctive traditions there is an overarching sense of identity and a feeling of belonging to Pendle. There has been an enormous number of representations made along similar lines and I am hopeful the Commission will have a re-think."

Note to Editors: Last month, the Pendle MP commented: "The people of Read, Sabden and Simonstone have been passed from pillar to post over recent years. Simonstone must be the most nomadic ward in the North West of England. Before the last Parliamentary Constituency review, Simonstone was part of the old Clitheroe seat. Then it was transferred to Burnley constituency at the last review. Then it went to Ribble Valley at last year's General Election. Now the Commission want to put it into Pendle - four constituencies in fifteen years! I think they deserve a breathing space."

For Immediate Release: 30 November 1993
202/93

TRANS PENNINE ROUTES GIVEN THUMBS DOWN BY GOVERNMENT

The Government is to take no action to upgrade or improve routes across the Pennines. The announcement today follows months of fevered speculation about the fate of the Government commissioned study which looked at possible options for routes across the Pennines.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "After endless dithering the Government has at last put everyone out of their misery. After all the hullabaloo it's "no action". I now want to see the blight lifted on the land safeguarded for the possible eastwards extension of the M65. If the motorway is not going anywhere beyond Colne then the safeguarding should also go."

"I also want to see a rapid start on the Colne Foulridge by-pass."

For Immediate Release: 1 December 1993
203/93

LEAVE PENDLE AS IT IS says PRENTICE

The boundaries of the Paliamentary constituency of Pendle should be left exactly as they are now says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was giving evidence today to the Parliamentary Boundary Commission's public inquiry, which has been sitting in County Hall, Preston since the beginning of the week.

Prentice ridiculed proposals to bring the Ribble Valley wards of Read, Sabden and Simonstone into Pendle - an area that has no rail or direct road link into the constituency. Prentice commented: "I am confident the sheer weight of objections will sink this absurd proposal. But the suggestion from the Conservative Party that Pendle should be asked to incorporate four rural Ribble Valley wards from the other side of the A59 really takes the biscuit. The Conservatives could only call in aid one person living in the area to support this bizarre proposal."

"Parliamentary constituencies are supposed to represent identifiable communities. People aren't pawns to be moved about for the convenience of

political parties. I have been most impressed by the enormous number of local people who have put pen to paper in support of keeping Pendle as it is."

For Immediate Release: 2 December 1993
204/93

PRENTICE LAMBASTS "CRIMINAL" ATTACK ON UNEMPLOYED

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has lambasted as "criminal" Budget proposals to axe unemployment benefit and replace it with a *Jobseeker's Allowance* which can only be claimed for up to six months.

'This measure is a criminal attack on the unemployed, who have been thrown out of work because this Government has chosen to make unemployment a tool of economic management. We were told: *Unemployment was a price well worth paying* to get inflation under control."

"By restricting entitlement to benefit to six months, the Government will be making the poor pay for their own poverty and the unemployed pay for their own unemployment. It is one step closer to the workhouse."

The axing of benefit will cut £470m from expenditure on unemployment and remove 200,000 people from the unemployment count. The Chancellor conceded in his Financial Statement that unemployment will be stuck at 2.75 million at least until 1996/7, but he plans no additional spending to provide unemployed people with the skills they need to get back to work."

'This criminal move by the Government will horrify people in Pendle where the jobless totals have risen relentlessly since John Major became Prime Minister. There are 2.9 million unemployed people in this country and we needed a Budget for jobs, for training and economic regeneration. Instead we have been given a crisis Budget designed hammer the nation's poorest people.

For Immediate Release: 2 December 1993
205/93

PRENTICE CRUSADES AGAINST BREAST CANCER

News that Britain has the world's highest mortality rate for breast cancer has appalled Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice who is calling called for a big improvement in the quality of treatment offered to breast cancer sufferers. He wants to see more breast cancer specialists trained to reduce the numbers of women dying annually from this disease. Over 150,000 women in Britain have or have had breast cancer and 15,000 women die each year from the disease.

The MP is backing the work of the charity *Breakthrough Breast Cancer* and wants to see awareness raised of the extent of breast cancer and the pressing need for further research into the disease.

"We must do everything possible to reduce the mortality rates from breast cancer in Britain" said Prentice. "It is a national disgrace that this country has the highest number of deaths from this disease in the entire world. We need to boost our breast cancer screening programmes and improve the quality of

treatment available to those women who are diagnosed as having the disease. We must ensure that women are better informed about this disease, how to detect it, and what treatment options are available. But more than anything, sufferers need a range of psychological, social and physical support services to help them deal with the illness. This is an issue which must be taken absolutely seriously - so many women are dying needlessly. We cannot allow things to go on as they are."

Note to Editors: The survival rate for women with breast cancer in Britain is very poor. In England and Wales 86% of women diagnosed survive for one year only, 71% survlve for three and 62% for five years. In Scotland the figures are similar with 87% surviving for one year, 72% for three and 62% for at least five.

For Immediate Release: 2 December 1993
206/93

PRENTICE CONDEMNS EQUALISATION OF RETIREMENT AGE at 65

The Government's decision to equalise the state retirement age at 65 years, announced in Tuesday's Budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has been condemned by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice is backing a Commons move demanding the Government re-evaluate its decision to equalise the retirement age at 65. "Given the endemic high levels of unemployment in Britain and the widespread public belief that a lowering of the retirement age for both men and women would help create job openings for the unemployed, this decision is simply bizarre."

"This is clearly absurd and unfair. It will save the Government £5 billion a year but a 30 year old woman would have to save an additional £45 a month to make equivalent provision for her retirement at 60."

"Women - and, indeed, men - shouldn't be forced to work until they drop. I want to see a flexible decade of retirement where people can choose to work or retire as they wish."

Note for Editors: Women will in future have to wait until reaching the age of 65 before being eligible to draw state pensions. The change will be phased in gradually from 2010 to 2020. Any woman under 44 will be affected. The first group of women to be affected are those born in December 1952 who will not be able to receive state pensions until they are 62 years and eight months.

For Immediate Release: 5 December 1993
207/93

MP INVESTIGATES POLLUTION OF STOCKS BECK

Responsibility for the pollution of Stocks Beck has been pinned firmly on the Government by local MP, Gordon Prentice, following an on-site inspection last weekend.

The MP was accompanied by Dr Chris Harpley, the North West Regional chief of the National Rivers Authority, and other senior staff responsible for water quality. Examination of the state of Stocks Beck and the Barnoldswick Sewage Works was prompted by revelations that the stream could have to wait until 2005 before facing a clean up.

"This leisurely timetable was plainly unacceptable" said Prentice. "But the real culprits are Government Ministers who promise the earth and deliver dust. The Government signed up to the European Community's *Urban Waste Water Directive* but are getting cold feet now they know how much it will cost to get our filthy rivers up to standard. They are rowing back from their commitments just as fast as they possibly can."

"Privatisation hasn't helped either as all the clean up costs fall on the separate water companies when before the costs of improving water quality were equalised across the country."

"We expect to hear by the end of January if Stocks Beck is to be declared environmentally sensitive by the Government. If it is, the clean up could be underway and completed by 1998 - still too many years away but at least this side of the millenium."

"Stocks Beck is absorbing too many nitrates from agricultural use and this promotes the growth of algae. There are also problems with dyes getting into the water course turning it an unnatural shade. But, at the bottom of it all, is the Barnoldswick Sewage Works. They do an excellent job there but the works were really

more follows

built in the wrong place. Stocks Beck is simply too small a stream to take the volume of treated effluent coming from the Sewage Works."

The MP concluded: "The people from the National Rivers Authority and from North West Water tell me there is absolutely no danger whatsoever to the health of the general public and we must be guided by the views of the microbiologists and all the other experts they have on tap. Nevertheless, people have a right to expect clean watercourses and it is the Government's job to ensure we get them. I shall be pressing Ministers to ensure they don't backtrack on their commitments."

For Immediate Release: 9 December 1993
208/93

PENDLE MP HAILS COMMONS VOTE ON SUNDAY TRADING

The decision of the House of Commons last night to allow Sunday trading within specified hours has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

In the wake of last night's vote Prentice said: "This whole issue has caused tremendous controversy and I know that many people will be upset by the

result of the vote. However, the law was being brought into disrepute and something had to be done."

"I voted for the option backed by the Shopping Hours Reform Council as the best practicable way forward. The plain fact is that many people shop on Sunday and want to continue to do so. Employee rights are to be protected and the measure that passed through the Commons has the support of the main shopworkers' union, USDAW.

"I hope we can now all get on with living our lives in the way we want to. People who want to shop on Sunday will be free to do so. And no shopworker will be compelled to work on Sunday."

For Immediate Release: 8 December 1993
209/93

LOCAL CHEMIST SHOPS STILL UNDER THREAT says MP

Pendle's chemist shops face a grim and uncertain future according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster following a top level meeting with representatives of pharmacists nationwide.

In October the Pendle MP warned that the pay deal imposed on pharmacists by the Department of Health could force local chemists to shut their doors to the public for good.

Under the terms of the deal, eligibility for the pharmacists' professional allowance depends on dispensing more than 1,500 prescriptions per month - unless the pharmacy is more than a mile away from the next one in which case it qualifies for protection. And for pharmacists dispensing fewer than 1,700 prescriptions per month a new lower fee applies. In Pendle 3 out of 18 pharmacies (17%) fall into this category. In Lancashire 35 out of 303 (12%) and in England as a whole 1,790 out of 9,763 (18%).

Prentice said: "This new regime for pharmacists is going to make it very difficult for many of them to keep their head above water financially. And it is going to cut dramatically the resale value of a chemists shop. For a pharmacist coming up to retirement, the hope of selling on the business as a going concern could now be a pipe-dream."

"There are fewer pharmacies per head of population in the UK than in Germany, France, Belgium, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy and Portugal. I am dead against any measures that would lead to further contraction in the service. Here in Britain there is one pharmacy for every 4,456 people compared with 3,530 in Germany and a mere 2,586 in France."

more follows

Local Chemist Shops under threat

"The Government has it in for our chemists. It is part of a concerted campaign to save money on prescriptions. Since the Tories came to power there have

been 15 increases in prescription charges. A prescription now costs £4.25p compared with 20p in 1979."

Note to Editors: Under the new system, from 1 November, the Government will pay pharmacists £1.35p for each of the first 1,700 prescriptions they dispense every month compared with the £1.59p they get now. Under the new formula - which is an interim measure before a single flat rate payment is introduced in 1995 - chemists will receive 94.5p for every prescription over the 1,700 mark compared with the current 80.5p.

At the time of the settlement the MP warned the imposed deal clearly discriminated against the small local pharmacy in favour of the giants such as Boots. The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee claimed 10% of chemist shops would lose up to 40% of their income and the Pharmacy Support Group representing 2,000 small independent chemists predicted 15% of pharmacies would close in the next two to three years.

On 2 March this year there was a 13% increase in prescription charges pushing the price up 50p to £4.25. At the time Prentice hit out at the Prime Minister for telling people to accept 1.5% pay increases while forcing them to swallow prescription charges eight times greater. There was also a 5% increase in dental fees but patients would have to pay 80% towards the cost of their treatment.

For Immediate Release: 7 December 1993
210/93

PENDLE MP PAYS TRIBUTE TO GORBACHEV

The West is doing the Russian people no favours by giving uncritical support to the current leadership of the Russian Federation said the former Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev.

Gorbachev was addressing a meeting today of the Inter Parliamentary Union at Westminster and had the opportunity to meet a number of British Members of Parliament face to face and discuss the forthcoming elections in Russia.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "It was an immense privilege to meet this giant of twentieth century history. He was the man who transformed the post war world but his contribution has never been recognised by his successor, Boris Yeltsin. Without Gorbachev there would still be a Berlin Wall."

"He warned us of the dangers of turning a blind eye to what was happening in Russia. He wanted Britain to speak out when basic democratic principles were set to one side. In particular, he urged the West to be on its guard against the stifling of internal opposition to Boris Yeltsin. He wanted us to be concerned about the controls on the Press, the abolition of the regional legislatures and the steady concentration of power in the hands of the Russian President."

"I took the opportunity to say a few words to him about Pendle. Given that his mind is on the multitude of problems facing the former Soviet Union he is incredibly well briefed on the current state of British politics."

For Immediate Release: 8 December 1993
211/93

MAJOR BACKS CURRY ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Prime Minister John Major has refused to rein in Local Government Minister, David Curry, who has been accused of pre-empting the results of the local government reorganisation in Yorkshire and Lancashire. The call to the Prime Minister to intervene came from Curry's next door neighbour, Labour MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice said: "The Prime Minister told me that David Curry would be guided by the official bible on these matters *Questions of Procedure for Ministers.* He also told me that decisions on local government reorganisation affecting his constituency would be taken by other Government Ministers. Yet Mr Curry is not just pronouncing on Craven and Ribble Valley, he is giving very explicit nods and winks to other councils outside his own patch.

"He told the Craven Herald a couple of weeks ago the Local Government Commission's proposed merger of Craven and Harrogate was *"a dead duck"*. He went on to say that York was *"virtually certain to get its own all purpose council and Harrogate is big enough at least to be able to put up a good case to manage its own affairs".* This comes from the man with direct responsibility for local government reorganisation and his statements come one month before he receives the final report on this very area from the Local Government Commission - the body set up to make recommendations on the future shape of local government."

"This episode demonstrates yet again that there is one sauce for the goose and another for the gander. He has, quite obviously, already formed a view on which councils should become unitary authorities."

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
212/93

MAJOR'S NURSERY SCHOOL PLEDGE IS FRAUDULENT says PENDLE MP

The Prime Minister has been dubbed a fraud by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The Pendle MP's stinging attack followed revelations in the Daily Express on 22 November that John Major was embarking on a "drive" to give every three year old a place in nursery school.

Prentice said: "The Express story was a complete invention. I asked the Prime Minister if it was the Government's policy to provide nursery places for all three and four year olds whose parents want it and the answer I received was wriggling with weasel words. The Prime Minister told me: *"The Government's policy is to promote choice and diversity of educational and other forms of provision for the under fives, within the resources available. The scale and pattern of provision locally are matters for individual local authorities and other local providers."* (My underlining for emphasis).

"This statement comes after the first unified Budget when no extra money was made available to local authorities for extra provision for the under fives. The Prime Minister's "drive" for universal nursery provision is wholly bogus."

ends

Note to Editors: Last month the Pendle MP dubbed John Major "a complete and unashamed hypocrite" following a front page lead story report in the Daily Express on 22 November 1993 which claimed the Prime Minister was launching a drive to give every three year old a place in a nursery school.

Express Political Editor, Jon Craig, wrote this front page "Exclusive" - **NURSERY SCHOOLS FOR ALL. Major aims to give every child of three a place in the classroom.** The story continued: *"A drive to give every three year old a place in nursery school has been launched by John Major. His plan, creating up to a million places, could be the biggest schools*

more follows

revolution this century... Despite objections from the cash strapped Treasury, the Prime Minister is convinced the move will be a big vote winner at the next election".

The Prime Minister's predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, promised - twenty one years ago - nursery places for all three and four year olds whose parents wanted it.

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
213/93

NHS "PAPERCHASE" IS COSTING AN ARM AND A LEG says PENDLE MP

Figures just released show that in the four year period from 1989 to 1993 - when the Government's health market changes were introduced - the annual pay bill for NHS managers rocketed by £358m to over £530m.

The cumulative extra salary bill since 1989 for extra NHS managers, administrators and clerical staff now stands at £1.5 billion.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice said: "The paybill for NHS managers has risen by over 200% since 1989 and the number of nursing and midwifery staff has plunged by 27,235 - a fall of 3.4%. Who would have believed it possible after everything we've heard about the NHS being safe in Tory hands?"

"Here in the North West, the situation is lamentable. Over this four year period we have lost 2,220 nursing and midwifery staff - or 5.9% of the total. At the same time the paybill for NHS managers has increased by £20.5m - an increase of 209.5%. The second highest increase of the 14 NHS regions in England.

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
214/93

COST OF COUNCIL TAX APPEALS "GOING THROUGH THE ROOF" says MP

Thousands of people in the North West are lodging appeals against their Council Tax assessment - the Government's property based replacement to the hated Poll Tax.

Over 700,000 appeals have gone in against the original property valuation and, of these, almost 600,000 remain outstanding.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The Council Tax was sold as a pain-free replacement for the odious Poll Tax. Yet hundreds of thousands of people are unhappy with the assessment they were given. Properties were not generally individually valued but were done by neighbourhood and by area and these "second gear" valuations have thrown up a lot of complaints.*

"The whole exercise is costing a fortune and is yet another example of Tory waste and incompetence. It costs an average £115 to process and settle a Council Tax appeal. It has already cost £12.5m and it will cost another £69m to clear the backlog."

"Here in the North West there are 69,034 appeals and 56,565 have yet to be settled at a total cost of £6.5m."

ends

Note to Editors: *The estate agents hired by the Government to do the valuations reputedly did so by cruising down streets in second gear, taking notes and making their assessments.

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
215/93

BIG CHANGES ON THE WAY FOR NEWSAGENTS predicts PENDLE MP

The Government is planning big changes in the way in which national newspapers are distributed and sold. Last week, DTI Minister Neil Hamilton, said the Government wanted "fundamental reforms" in UK newspaper distribution. He was commenting on the report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the £1.2 billion newspaper distribution industry.

At present, national newspapers are distributed by a very limited number of wholesalers who act as gatekeepers - allowing (or not allowing) new newspaper sellers into the market.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The present situation is a real dog's breakfast. Here in Pendle some newsagents are concerned about their livelihoods if the market is opened up completely so that anyone who wishes to sell papers can do so. On the other hand, grocers and corner shops complain they are not being allowed into the market. The situation is further confused by the fact that supermarkets and petrol stations often sell newspapers as a matter of course. And to cap it all, you can buy our local papers all over the shop!"

"Monopolies *generally* work against the public interest and newspaper distribution and supply is no different from many other commodities. I hope to discuss the whole matter early in the new year with local representatives of the National Federation of Retail Newsagents."

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
216/93

COUNCIL REVIEW ON COLLISION COURSE WITH GOVERNMENT says MP

The Local Government Commission - the body charged with the task of recommending changes to the local authority map in England - is on a confrontation course with the Government according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP believes the importance the Commission attaches to local opinion could lead it to recommend solutions unacceptable to the Government. In its progress report, *Reviewing Local Government in the English Shires*, published earlier this week the Commission *"believes it will be most unwise to press ahead with changes to create unitary authorities unless there is clear local support for change, and there are local champions for particular local solutions. There are advantages to the existing two tier structure. If it is to be replaced, it must be with something better..."* (paragraph 119)

The Commission tested local support in North Yorkshire for new unitary structures and 54% of those surveyed wanted no change. (The survey excluded York, Harrogate and Craven) Only 13% wanted new unitary authorities from merged districts.

Prentice commented: "The solution advocated by my next door neighbour, Local Government Minister, David Curry, is totally off-the-wall. He is on record arguing for a Craven/Ribble Valley link up, crossing the Lancashire/Yorkshire county boundary. I doubt if there is much support for this proposal and I wasn't even aware that it was being canvassed as a possible option until I read Mr Curry's column in the local Press."

"He has conjured this proposed new unitary authority out of the mists. And this is the same man who told the House of Commons Environment Select Committee on 3 November that local government reform should be based on ideas that have been generated locally!"

more follows

Local Government Review

"This reform of local government is going to end in tears, just like all the others. The Conservatives have been responsible for every post war reorganisation of local government and each one has been flawed."

ends

Note to Editors: On 3 November 1993, the Minister of Local Government, David Curry MP, told the Environment Select Committee: *"We are seeking a structure of local government with which people can identify. How do you get*

there? A lot of it depends on where you begin. If you begin with recommendations which are based on local building blocks, which are based upon ideas which have been generated locally, I believe that most people will endorse and support that. If you come up with recommendations which appear not to have been built upon local consent, not upon using the building blocks, which appear to have been, as it were, put together by a sort of commissar, then I think you will find that people are not very enthusiastic..." (Page 47)

Last month, the Government issued revised guidance to the Commission, ordering a speeding up of the review and completion by the end of next year. The Commission is due to make initial proposals on Lancashire by the end of February 1994 with a target date for its final report on the County by the end of July.

For Immediate Release: 14 December 1993
217/93

MP CALLS FOR 'RAPID ACTION' ON BURST WATER MAINS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused North West Water of foot-dragging over the replacement of the water mains at Foulridge. The village has had to cope with a series of bursts over recent years.

Prentice said: "This water main bursts at the drop of a hat and needs to be replaced as a matter of urgency. It burst twice in 1988, once in 1991, once in 1992 and no fewer than three times this year. There can hardly be a leakier mains in Lancashire."

"Yet when I contacted the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, he told me Foulridge had generally good water quality. Replacement would have to wait until other poor water quality mains were tackled first. What an appalling state of affairs!"

"The fact that other mains are in an even worse state than the one at Foulridge is the excuse for not acting immediately. In fact, he cannot even give me a firm date when the work will start although he holds out a vague promise that the new Foulridge mains could be included in the 1995/6 programme."

"I shall be pressing for early action. When people turn on the tap they have a right to expect good, clean water - not a lot of hot air and excuses."

ends

Note 1 to Editors:
The letter, dated 9 December, from the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, to local MP, Gordon Prentice, reads:

"Thank you for your letter... I am sorry to hear of the problems (your constituents) have been experiencing. The village is supplied by a 6" diameter main along Skipton New Road. This main has burst three times this year and the entire village, comprising of approximately 500 properties, is without water during repairs.

Following repairs, discoloured water occurs when supplies are restored, as deposits of iron and manganese in the main are disturbed. The main also failed once in 1991 and 1992 and twice in 1988. Generally, the water quality in Foulridge is good, but this is not the case in many other areas.

Our investment strategy is to refurbish mains in areas which have a proven water quality problem as indicated by failure of routine samples.

We have given an undertaking to the Drinking Water Inspectorate to refurbish 3500 kilometres of such mains by the end of 1994. We intend to meet this target. When we have completed the refurbishment of mains causing water quality problems, we will deal with mains failures that cause interruption to supplies.

ln Foulridge we intend to provide e duplicate main when our detailed capital expenditure plans are prepared for 1995 onwards. We will give a priority to each scheme based on the frequency and period of interruptions, together with the number of our customers affected. The Foulridge main will be assessed in this way and placed in our capital programme.

Unfortunately, I cannot give you a firm date at the moment. The priority of the scheme could increase if more bursts occur, or in fact be overtaken by other similar schemes. We will be finalising our 1995/96 programme during 1994 and the Foulridge main could be included.

I trust this clarifies our position and would be grateful if you could convey my apologies to your constituents for the inconvenience caused."

Note 2 to Editors: On 10 December 1993, the Financial Times reported:
North West Water, the privatised utility, yesterday announced a 6 per cent increase in interim pretax profits to £138.2m and a slightly higher than expected dividend...
Analysts also said the group was suffering from uncertainty over management succession following the abrupt departure last month of Mr Bob Thian, the chief executive linked to the group's international expansion... North West has also been successful in winning international contracts, and yesterday announced the signing of its latest joint venture to extend and operate Malaysia's sewerage system...
The UK regulated water business showed a 16 per cent increase in operating profits to £168.3m. Turnover rose by 7 per cent to £369.6m. There was a £4.6m decline in industrial and commercial volumes.

Note 3 to Editors: The legal position. Section 37 of the Water Industry Act 1991 imposes a general duty on water companies to maintain a water supply

system. In respect of water mains, Section 37(1)(b) states that it shall be the duty of water undertakers "to ensure that all such arrangements have been made for maintaining, improving and extending the water undertaker's water mains and other pipes as are necessary for securing that the undertaker is and continues to be able to meet its obligations under this Part (of the Act)."

Water undertakers can be forced, if necessary, to comply with their duties by means of enforcement orders issued by the Secretary of State or the Director General of the Office of Water Services (OFWAT) under Section 18 of the Act.

Section 60 of the Act gives powers to water undertakers to disconnect water supplies for the purposes of carrying out necessary works such as those following a burst water main. However, the undertaker owes a duty to its customers to ensure that such works are carried out "with reasonable dispatch" and a duty to provide an emergency supply if the works are not completed within 24 hours. Any breach of this duty by the water undertaker "which causes any person to whom it is owed to sustain loss or damage" is actionable by that person.

If the water supply is not re-connected within 48 hours of the water undertaker becoming aware of a mains burst then the undertaker must pay the customer (or credit his/her account) £10. This compensation is a requirement of Regulation 7 (2)(b) of the Water Supply and Sewerage Services (Customer Services Standards) Regulations 1989. These regulations also require water undertakers to take all reasonable steps to notify affected customers "as soon as is reasonably practicable"

- of the fact that the supply has been interrupted or cut off and
- where any alternative supply can be obtained
- of the time by which it is proposed the supply should be restored and
- of the telephone number of an office from which further information can be obtained.

The duty to ensure that water supplies are "laid on constantly" (Section 65) does not apply "during any period during which it is reasonable for that supply to be cut off or reduced for the purposes of the carrying out of any necessary works".

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
218/93

"PUFFING BILLY" GETS UP STEAM

Pendle's campaigning MP, Gordon Prentice, is delighted to learn that British Rail has started the track improvements which will enable Pendle rail passengers on the Colne to Preston line to travel at speeds of 50 mph and over.

At the weekend, eagle-eyed Colne Labour councillor, Tim Ormrod, spotted the maintenance crew working on the line in blizzard conditions. He was told by the engineer that they were working to improve the track to enable the increase in speed and to make sure that the line had many more years of service.

Mr Prentice confirmed the maintenance investment with British Rail North West Network Manager who told him that they had decided to make a large investment in centralising the track, re-ballasting the line and drainage work. Stephen Cornish said that the work would be carried out over the next few Sundays, with the minimum of disruption to the timetable.

This news comes at the end of intense lobbying of British Rail by the MP, Colne Labour Councillors, Pendle Borough Council and Lancashire County Council. Prentice said: "I am pleased to see that the Puffing Billy will now become the Lindford Christie. This clearly shows that British Rail's long term view is that the line is worth investment and has many years of life to continue serving my constituents."

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
219/93

MP THROWS THE BOOK AT PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Too little money is being spent on books in our public libraries says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was shocked to learn from the National Book Committee that book funding in public libraries has now reached the stage where, on average, local authorities can only buy 45 pages of book per person per year.

The MP said: "We hear these incantations about literacy from the Government but they are doing precious little to promote it. We are fortunate here in Lancashire where the County Council spends £2.18p per head on books (1991/2) - the sixth highest amount in the 39 English counties. Next door in North Yorkshire they only spend £1.67p putting them almost bang in the middle in joint 20th position along with Wiltshire."

"A library is a marvellous resource for the entire community. The very existence of a library is a statement about the value we place on open and free access to information."

Note to Editors: Over the decade 1981/2 to 1991/2 Lancashire increased its spending on books by 207% in cash terms (from 71p to £2.18p). North Yorkshire's figures for the same period were 87p and £1.67p - a cash increase of 92%

For Immediate Release: 15 December 1993
220/93

PRENTICE SLAMS DECISION ON THORP

The Government's decision, announced in the Commons today, to allow THORP to start up without a public inquiry has been condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

"Back in early October, I described THORP as a nuclear white elephant and nothing that has happened since has persuaded me to change my mind. We still haven't seen the Touche Ross report on the economics of reprocessing and

we are simply expected to accept the assurances we have been given by the Government and BNFL."

"Once BNFL throws the switch on THORP it becomes radio-active and it will cost millions to close down. A Public Inquiry was needed to assess the need for this reprocessing plant and to examine in public the very real health and safety concerns that many people have - especially here in the North West as the plant is on our doorstep."

ends

Note to Editors: The Government announced on 4 August 1993 another round of public consultation on THORP. This consultation ended on 4 October. Last year BNFL applied for revised authorisations under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 to discharge radioactive waste from its reprocessing site at Sellafield to allow for the operation of its Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP). THORP will reprocess spent nuclear fuel from advanced gas cooled and pressurised water reactors.

For Immediate Release: 16 December 1993
222/93

PENDLE JOBLESS TOTAL FALLS

The number of people unemployed and claiming benefit in Pendle has fallen for the third successive month and now stands at 2,719 (7.2%). The November figures show 2,149 men and 570 women were searching for work.

Vacancies are down at Colne and Nelson Job Centres but are following the seasonal trend.

The MP commented: "What people find mystifying is the continuing drop in unemployment when job losses seem to be accelerating. Colne, for example, has has so many closures, redundancies and cut backs it is turning into an industrial lunar landscape."

"There is an enormous iceberg of hidden unemployment. Every possible inducement is given to get people off the jobless register - a fact confirmed by former Conservative Employment Minister, Alan Clark. We all know the figures are massaged and manipulated."

Note to editors: There have been over 30 changes since 1979 to the way in which the unemployment totals are calculated - and each revision, except one, has been in a downwards direction. If the method used to measure unemployment in 1979 were in place today, there would be more than 4 million on the register. (See Press Release 191/93)

The Chancellor announced in the Unified Budget that Unemployment Benefit is to be scrapped and replaced with a *Jobseeker's Allowance* which can only be claimed for up to 6 months.

For Immediate Release: 21 December 1993
223/93

FLOOD CHAOS: MP CALLS FOR ACTION

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for urgent action to safeguard the area against the flash floods which devastated Barrowford and plunged much of East Lancashire into chaos.

The MP said: "We cannot stop torrential rain drenching Pendle or protect against "acts of God" but we need to tackle the notorious weak-points where very heavy rain is likely to cause trouble. I feel for the residents in Holme Street and Lower Clough Street in Barrowford whose homes were deluged and possessions ruined. But they expect a bit more than tea and sympathy. They have a right to expect action to prevent this happening again."

"I have asked the local authority for a full report on the flooding and the measures that need to be taken to prevent a recurrence."

For Immediate Release: 7 January 1994
Number 01/94

PAY MORE AND GET LESS

1994 will be the year when Pendle families pay more and get less according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. In a New Year message to the local Labour Party, the MP claims Norman Lamont and now Kenneth Clarke have started a snowball of tax rises for the British people.

Prentice said: "It's time the Conservatives were honest about taxes. Having won an election telling people they would cut taxes they have now announced the biggest tax hike in British history. The Chancellor has admitted the increases are the equivalent to a staggering seven pence on income tax." (Treasury Select Committee, 15 December 1993).

The MP continued: "These swingeing increases in taxes are not little blips in a graph. They will make a significant difference to the standard of living of millions of people. In the first full year of these tax increases, a typical family will lose over £500 - or £10 a week. In the second full year this will rise to £832 or £16 a week."

"The Budget had some good ideas - although these were the ones pinched from the Labour Party. The Government conceded some help for childcare although it stopped well short of the comprehensive support which we have been calling for. Our campaign for nursery places for all three and four year olds whose parents want it has yet to persuade the Government to act despite the Prime Minister's rhetoric."

"They closed some tax loopholes but left others gaping open. Why don't the Tories do something about the millionaires who claim they are not British domiciled but who have the benefit of living here and making money in Britain. Asil Nadir, the millionaire and contributor to Tory Party funds, fell into this category until he jumped bail and fled to Cyprus."

more follows

"One third of all estates inherited that are worth over £1 million pay no inheritance tax at all" said the MP.

Note to Editors: As a result of the Conservative's two 1993 budgets, a typical family will pay the following additional taxes from April 1994. (Note. All these taxes have legislative force. They are not speculative.)

Tax Outgoings	every week	every year
National Insurance Contributions - up 1p	£3.19	£165.88
Mortgage Tax Relief - relief cut to 25%	£2.24	£116.48
Married Couples Allowance - frozen and cut to 20%	£1.85	£96.20
VAT on domestic fuel at 8%	£1.29	£67.08
Single person's allowance - frozen	£0.34	£17.68
Extension of 20p tax band	£0.38(-)	£19.76(-)
Excise Duties - over indexation	£0.79	£41.08
New Insurance Tax and airport tax - October 94 (full year cost £31.20)	£0.60	£15.60

From April 1995 some of these taxes will go up again:

VAT on domestic fuel now up to 17.5%	£1.53	£79.56
Effects of changing allowances and 20p band	£1.65	£85.80
Mortgage Tax - relief again cut. This time to 15%	£2.24	£116.48
Excise Duties - over indexation	£0.67	£34.84

For Immediate Release: 8 January 1994
Number 02/94

PRENTICE TO PRESS FOR EARLY COMMONS DEBATE ON FUTURE OF THE POST OFFICE

The future of the Post Office - destabilised by continuing uncertainty over whether or not it is to be privatised - is likely to settled later this year according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Last month, the MP pressed Leader of the House of Commons and Government business manager, Tony Newton, to make time available for an early debate on the future of what Prentice described as "this national institution paralysed by Government uncertainty and drift". Newton refused to give any commitment.

Prentice commented: "We need an early statement on the Government's intentions and, so far, the silence is absolutely deafening. Last year I had an enormous postbag on this issue which is of obvious concern to thousands of people here in Pendle and millions nationwide. I have had no fewer than 8,000 local people contact me either by letter or by way of the petition which I delivered to the Prime Minister in July."

"The background to the current uncertainty lies in the Government's commitment to privatise the Post Office - although this did not appear in the Conservative's 1992 General Election manifesto. About a year ago the Minister responsible for the Post Office - Edward Leigh, the MP for Gainsborough and Horncastle - was sacked from the Government but we know from his recent statements that before his departure from office he delivered a report to Number 10 on Post Office privatisation. At the end of the year, he publicly accused the Prime Minister of suppressing the report - describing John Major's dithering as "political funk". And now, the Chairman of the Post Office has publicly accused the Government of drift and uncertainty saying that the absence of a decision - one way or the other - on Post Office privatisation is causing great damage to the organisation."

More follows

Post Office dithering

"The Government should immediately declare its intentions one way or the other" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: Last year, a major campaign was organised concerning the future of the sub post office network. Local Postmasters and Postmistresses feared for their businesses and livelihoods if the Government decided to move over to "automated credit transfer" for pensions and other benefits. Under this set-up, pensions and other payments would be made directly into the person's bank account and no transactions would take place over the Post Office counter. There was a furious reaction to this proposal and the Government has, so far, backed off. They say no-one will be obliged to accept payment by this method unless he or she specifically agrees to it.

Crown Post Offices are closing at an alarming rate. Over the UK as a whole, the number of Crown Post Offices has plummeted from 1,499 in 1987/8 to 881 by November 1993. In Lancashire over the same period we have gone from 23 to 14. And here in Pendle we are down from three to one - in Nelson - and now even that is under threat. The number of Crown Post Offices has shrunk by over 40% since 1987/8.

Post Offices are not allowed to compete with the private sector on even terms as they are not permitted to act as agents for commercial organisations and sell other services such as insurance. The Post Office has been pressing the Government to allow it the freedom to do this but has come up against a brick wall. Many suspect it is a calculated policy to weaken the Post Office, making it easier to break up and privatise.

By July 1993, one person in eight of Pendle's adult population of 65,000 had written to local MP or signed the petitions protesting about the Government's threat to local post offices. The petition, containing over 8,000 names, was handed in to 10 Downing Street that same month.

For Immediate Release: 8 January 1994
Number 03/94

MP FEARS DELAY IN STOCKS BECK CLEAN UP

Leaked documents showing the Government is preparing to abandon plans to clean up the nation's 26,000 miles of waterway have prompted fears that the polluted Stocks Beck could be an early casualty. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, revealed last October that the watercourse could have to wait until 2005 before being cleaned up.

The latest disclosures, published in today's Observer, suggest the Government is planning to delay or scrap entirely much needed environmental work to improve the water quality of Britain's rivers and streams.

The Observer report (Whitehall slashes 100 schemes to clean up polluted waterways) claims a list of 131 priority clean up schemes for sewage works in England and Wales, drawn up by the National Rivers Authority, has been rejected by the Department of the Environment as too expensive. The newspaper alleges *"The NRA was forced to slash the list of schemes - the cost of which will be borne by the water companies - to 29. The confidential list will be considered by Environment Secretary, John Gummer this month."*

"This leak is disturbing news indeed. I want action on Stocks Beck and I want it now and I am not prepared to be fobbed off by Government Ministers. I intend to raise the matter in Parliament this week" said Prentice.

Last month, the MP inspected Stocks Beck and the Barnoldswick Sewage Works with Dr Chris Harpley, the North West Regional chief of the National Rivers Authority, and other senior staff responsible for water quality. At the time, the MP said it was "plainly unacceptable" for an eleven year delay in the clean up.

Note to Editors: The MP disclosed last month that a decision by the Government to declare Stocks Beck environmentally sensitive could accelerate the clean up and get it completed by 1998. At the time he said this was still too many years away "but at least it is this side of the millenium."

Following the on-site inspection Prentice observed: "Stocks Beck is absorbing too many nitrates from agricultural use and this promotes the growth of algae. There are also problems with dyes getting into the water course turning it an

unnatural shade. But, at the bottom of it all, is the Barnoldswick Sewage Works. They do an excellent job there but the works were really built in the wrong place. Stocks Beck is simply too small a stream to take the volume of treated effluent coming from the Sewage Works."

For Immediate Release: 12 January 1994
Number 04/94

GOVERNMENT GRANTS TO PENDLE "INDEFENSIBLE" says PRENTICE

The new system of allocating Government cash to councils has been described as "absolutely indefensible" by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who today joined an all Party deputation of Pendle councillors - led by Council Leader, Susan Nike - to lobby the Government for help.

The deputation, supported by Council Chief Executive Stephen Barnes, told Environment Minister Tony Baldry MP that changes to the way in which the area's social and economic needs are assessed by the Government - and grants are allocated - had put Pendle over a barrel financially.

The Government's new formulae had pushed Pendle down from 70th in the current year's list of councils ranked by deprivation and need to 154th in the new financial year starting in April. At the same time, councillors told Mr Baldry an independent study from the University of Bristol showed Pendle 54th in the scale out of 366 authorities in terms of material deprivation. The crude effect of this is to lose the council £1m of resources in the space of a single year. And in spite of a standstill budget, changes to the "transitional relief" brought in to cushion the impact of the move from Poll Tax to the Council Tax would mean Pendle receiving £300,000 in 1994/5 compared with £1m in the current year. Without a re-think this will feed through to the Council Tax this year with big percentage increases.

After the meeting, Prentice commented: "The message from everyone present was "Give us a break!". Pendle has somersaulted backwards through hoops to balance its Budget and keep things on an even keel and then along comes the Government and changes the rules with this appalling effect. The Council made a powerful case to the Minister. I hope he will respond positively."

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1994
Number 05/94

MP RENEWS CALL FOR GREATER MINIBUS SAFETY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for better safety regulations for coaches and minibuses.

Last October, the Pendle MP called on Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, to ensure all school transport was fitted with seat belts. Weeks after this, a tragic motorway accident claimed the lives of twelve children from Hagley RC High School.

Prentice said: "We need to put an end to avoidable deaths

and injuries caused by coach and minibus accidents. Parents in Pendle must be able to feel sure that their children are travelling in well laid out and properly maintained minibuses with seatbelts, driven by drivers who have been trained and tested. Pensioners and people with disabilities need equal protection.

"Labour is urging the Government to hold talks with all interested organisations and thrash out new regulations to protect everybody who travels in a coach or minibus. And I shall be contacting local organisations asking them to support Labour's Safety in Transit campaign.

Those supporting Labour's campaign for safer coach and mini bus travel include the British Roads Federation, Bus and Coach Council, Community Transport Association, National Union of Teachers. RAC and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

Note to Editors:

(1) The key points of Labour's Safety in transit campaign:

• Installing and wearing of seat belts in coaches and minibuses to be compulsory. New and tougher regulation of internal design and seat layout to be thrashed out with operators of coaches and minibuses.

• Training and testing of coach and minibus drivers to be made compulsory. Local registers of licensed drivers to be collated and available for public inspection. Specific licensing system to be determined after talks with the voluntary and educational sectors.

• End of the 'three for two' rule for children in large seats.

• Compulsory fitting of fuel tank cut-off devices and electrical system cut-off devices in all new coaches and minibuses.

• Voluntary operated minibuses to be required to take full Public Service Vehicle MOT tests.

• Discussions to be held with insurance industry to provide incentives for upgrading of existing buses, coaches and minibuses.

• Discussions to be held with motoring organisations, consumer groups and motorway users before introducing improvements in service area provision, rest/picnic areas, motorway lighting and information systems and roadworks.

(2) Background information: Recent accidents on British motorways have highlighted the need for increased coach and minibus safety. Their design, layout and maintenance, together with driver training and testing, are inadequately regulated. Yet their passengers are likely to include the most vulnerable social groups, including children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT: The present regulations controlling the design and layout of minibuses are inadequate. Well designed minibuses have good seating complete with three-point seatbelts, easy access to and from seats and

doors, well upholstered interiors and all subject to regular inspection and maintenance. In contrast, some other minibuses have a 'crew bus' layout with bench seats parallel to the sides, no seat belts, a bare metal interior and no adequate inspection. The worst must be brought up to the standard of the best. This can only be done by Government regulation.

SEATBELTS: At present, it is compulsory to install and wear seat belts in the front seats of minibuses and coaches, but not elsewhere in the vehicle. A major cause of injuries and deaths comes from passengers being thrown out of their seats, on to the seat in front, or out of the vehicle altogether. In one incident, a child was killed when she was thrown out of the back of a minibus, across the central reservation and into the path of oncoming traffic. At present, three children under 14 years of age are allowed to share two seats. This unsafe practice must be stopped.

Most safety experts agree that compulsory wearing of seatbelts to restrain the passenger in the seat will lead to fewer deaths and less serious injuries. The Government has not succeeded in getting EC agreement to the compulsory installation and wearing of seatbelts on coaches and minibuses. They need to try harder.

DRIVER TRAINING AND LICENSING: At present, anyone over 21 years of age who holds a current driving licence can drive a minibus with up to 17 passengers.

Yet driving minibuses is a more complex, stressful and responsible task than driving the standard family car. Trials show that even basic driver assessment and training will reduce the likelihood of accidents. In one local authority area where basic driver assessment, training and regular rechecking was implemented, there was a 70 per cent reduction in repair costs over a three year period.

Proper regulation to require the training and testing of volunteer drivers would undoubtedly reduce the number of accidents. Goodwill is no substitute for safe performance.

IMPROVEMENTS IN BRITAIN'S MOTORWAYS: Another cause for concern is lack of motorway services and roadside picnic areas. In some areas at present, motorway users can travel over 150 miles without finding a single service area. With driver fatigue a common cause of accidents, more service areas would add to motorway safety.

Better motorway lighting and information systems would also help improve safety on the motorways, as would better procedures for roadworks.

SAFETY ACROSS THE NETWORK: Many more accidents take place on trunk and principal 'A' roads than on motorways. In 1992, the percentage of all road accidents which occurred on motorways was 2.8 per cent, compared with 9.2 per cent for trunk roads and 37.7 per cent for principal roads. Improvements in the existing road network should not be confined to motorways but should cover all roads.

(3) On 20 October 1993, The Roads Minister, Robert Key, told the Pendle MP *"Many thousands of children travel to school each day in coaches, buses and minibuses, which remain the safest form, of road transport in this country,*

considerably safer in fact than other means of transport, including private cars. The local education authority, or governing body of a school, can stipulate that all buses used should have seat belts, but in reality few do so."

In November, the MP wrote to Education Secretary, John Patten, urging additional resources to be made available to schools to offset the cost of fitting seat belts.

For Immediate Release: 25 January 1994
Number 06/94

NOT USED

For Immediate Release: 12 January 1994
Number 07/94

PENDLE'S JOBLESS MOVES UP AGAIN

Unemployment is up again Pendle after three months in which it edged downwards. The December 93 totals, released today, show 2,772 people in Pendle out of work (7.4%) and claiming benefit compared with 2,719 for November ((7.2%). These figures are below the national and regional averages.

Of the 2,772 people, 2,196 are men and 576 women. Vacancies at the job centres in Colne and Nelson are down.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "On the Frost Programme last Sunday morning, I heard the Prime Minister explain what he really meant by the *"Back to Basics"* policy. He said it was designed to meet the fears of ordinary people about unemployment, rising crime, educational standards and so on. The man has no sense of irony whatsoever.

"The Prime Minister and the former Chancellor, Norman Lamont, told us, in the celebrated phrase, "unemployment was a price well worth paying..." and now we are advised that the *Back to Basics* policy is about meeting people's fears about unemployment!"

"I won't even begin to be satisfied until John Major gets unemployment in Pendle down to the level he inherited from his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher. In November 1990, the figure stood at 1,708.

Note to Editors: For trend figures see attached Pendle Job Watch (10/94)

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1994
Number 08/94

PRENTICE PRESSES FOR ACTION ON UNDER FIVES EDUCATION

The Government should talk less and act more on the needs of the under fives according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, following a meeting today with Local Government Minister, David Curry.

The local MP and other Labour Parliamentary colleagues joined an all-Party deputation from Lancashire County Council led by Council Leader, Louise Ellman. The team of councillors and officials arrived at Westminster determined to press the case for additional Government resources lost from Lancashire and channelled into southern counties such as Kent, Essex and Hampshire.

Prentice told the Local Government Minister that Lancashire had a cast iron case for more money to help the under fives - especially in the light of the Prime Minister's public utterances on the desirability of more nursery education.

The MP said: "The County Council calculates it should receive an extra £4.9 million for its Under Fives. (The reference here is to the Under Fives SSA or Standard Spending Assessment. A council's SSA is the amount of money the Government thinks it ought to spend on a particular service to achieve parity of provision - or a standard level of service - across the country. The importance of the SSA is that it determines the level of central government grant).

"At the moment, the Government does its sums on the basis of the under five population county by county - rather than by actual under five pupil numbers. The County Council has been putting a lot of emphasis on the under fives and is being unfairly penalised for doing what the Government apparently wants to encourage. Mr Curry told us what we already knew - that under fives provision was non statutory. He said councils were open to do as much or as little as they liked which was why the formula used
under fives population as the benchmark rather than the numbers actually in nursery education."

"His argument is absolutely specious. We've had the Prime Minister going on and on about his commitment to nursery education yet the Government shies away from backing councils like Lancashire who are trying to do something about it. And the business about non statutory services is quite disingenuous. The Education SSA recognises, and therefore finances, post 16 education provision - which is also non statutory."

"If the Government is serious about nursery education it should make it a statutory requirement. Simple as that."

"There is a related, important issue that needs to be addressed. And that is about who gets nursery education in the first place. Government policy is to restrict public provision to children in need because of "health or social difficulties" not to all under fives. The County Council, quite properly, steers resources into those areas that are most deprived but why should children elsewhere lose out on nursery education? The answer must be to make provision universal."

Note to Editors:

(1) Lancashire County Council's Under Fives SSA is £25.772m - 2.76% of the national total. But, based on numbers on school registers at January 1992, the authority had 3.28% of the national total of pupil numbers. The council told the Minister this position had arisen as a result of their policy over a number

of years of expanding provision for education for the under fives. The proportion of the national total of pupil numbers in January for each of the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 was 3.5%, 3.4% and 3.36% respectively... The SSA distribution is clearly failing to support the actual level of provision for the under fives in Lancashire.

The primary, secondary and post 16 sub blocks of the Education SSA use pupil numbers to assess the need to spend - not population numbers. The Council contends the under fives SSA should be assessed in the same way.

(2) A detailed explanation of Labour's policy for the Under Fives is set out in Press Release 186/93 (16 November 1993)

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1994
Number 09/94

LIB DEM WHITEWASH ON RACIST LEAFLETS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has spoken out against the decision of a committee of the Liberal Democrat's London Regional Executive not to expel two of their councillors in Tower Hamlets who were involved in the "racist leaflets" controversy.

Prentice commented: "We were told that Paddy Ashdown wanted "decisive action" on these scurrilous Liberal Democrat election leaflets. It is as plain as a pikestaff the leaflets pandered to racism yet it appears that nothing is going to happen to the people responsible."

"Even some prominent Liberal Democrats choked on the sight of these leaflets which go way beyond the kind of grotesque parodies of the truth that we are used to seeing on their so called *Focus* leaflets. The Lib Dem MP for Bermondsey, Simon Hughes, has courageously spoken out on the issue - but before the recent inquiry decision. He said *"senior Party members could not, and would not, continue in the Party if it produced a whitewash. In my view these leaflets are racist and unacceptable."*

Prentice continued: "I was disappointed to see our local Liberal Democrat councillor, Tony Greaves, accuse those members of his Party who were advocating some form of disciplinary action "of indulging in *political correctness."* (see The Guardian 17 Nov 93)

"It is for the Liberal Democrats to set their own house in order - but members of all political parties and none have a legitimate interest in the outcome of this whole sordid business."

PENDLE JOB WATCH: Jobless totals since John Major became PM
from Gordon Prentice MP

Unemployed	Date	Rate
1708	Nov-90	4.5
2037	Dec-90	5.3
2199	Jan-91	5.7
2286	Feb-91	5.9
2467	Mar-91	6.4

2494	Apr-91	6.5				
2548	May-91	6.6				
2608	Jun-91	6.8				
2752	Jul-91	7.1				
2815	Aug-91	7.3				
2762	Sep-91	7.2				
2651	Oct-91	6.9				
2610	Nov-91	6.8				
2684	Dec-91	7				
3001	Jan-92	7.8				
2958	Feb-92	7.7				
2948	Mar-92	7.6				
3020	Apr-92	7.8				
3064	May-92	7.9				
3015	Jun-92	7.8				
3274	Jul-92	8.5				
3355	Aug-92	8.7				
3216	Sep-92	8.3	Colne		Vacancies	Nelson
2950	Oct-92	7.6		114	Oct-92	368
2822	Nov-92	7.3		110	Nov-92	236
3006	Dec-92	7.8		102	Dec-92	166
3161	Jan-93	8.2		49	Jan-93	160
3031	Feb-93	7.9		91	Feb-93	150
3025	Mar-93	7.8		93	Mar-93	128
2972	Apr-93	*7.9		87	Apr-93	158
2861	May-93	7.6		110	May-93	160
2928	Jun-93	7.8		113	Jun-93	176
3234	Jul-93	8.6		99	Jul-93	142
3237	Aug-93	8.6		121	Aug-93	155
3065	Sep-93	8.1		99	Sep-93	196
2783	Oct-93	7.4		124	Oct-93	349
2719	Nov-93	7.2		105	Nov-93	261
2772	Dec-93	7.4		96	Dec-93	153

*change in method of calculating working population

For Immediate Release: 13 January 1994
Number 11/94

MP BACKS MOVES TO SAVE PENDLE FIRE COVER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is again backing moves to prevent cuts in Pendle's fire cover. The engine in Colne is again threatened by the cash strapped County Council. Last year, the axe hung over two fire engines - one in Colne and the other at Barnoldswick - but both were reprieved.

The MP is meeting local fire-fighters tomorrow evening (Friday 14th) and has already pressed Lancashire County Council to look again at proposed fire cuts which are to be considered next week.

Prentice said: "We cannot have this constant examination and re-examination of our fire cover every year. I looked at the whole position in detail twelve months ago when there were similar concerns expressed about the number of

fire engines in Pendle. I cannot believe the situation has changed so dramatically that a reduction in fire cover is now on the cards."

"We can't afford to take risks with this vital emergency service" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: In January of last year, fire-fighters from Colne Fire Station told the County Council's Fire and Public Protection Committee that Colne was one of the busiest 2 pump retained stations in the county with over 350 calls in 1992. The Fire Station at Colne is in the centre of Pendle which allows the 2 pumps to provide cover and back-up to the two key stations at Burnley and Nelson, plus Barnoldswick and Earby. They also provide the second pump to all pumps at Cowling.

For Immediate Release: 17 January 1994
Number 12/94

MP UNVEILS TORY "TAX DIARY"

Direct taxes are now higher than they were when Labour left office in 1979 according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Increases in national insurance tax, reductions in the value of tax allowances and cuts in mortgage tax relief mean the direct tax burden on a typical family will rise to 21.9% in 1994/5 - a full one per cent higher than when the Conservatives came to power.

Indirect taxes have also soared. Since 1979 the rate of VAT has gone up from 8% to 17.5% and VAT has been charged on more and more bills. There have been 14 extensions of the scope of the tax.

Prentice commented: "People here in Pendle - like everyone else nationwide - are waiting for the Tory tax bombshell to explode over their heads. The Government is responsible for the biggest tax hike in British history - with hidden tax increases equivalent to 7p on income tax. As a result of the tax increases already announced by the Government, a typical family will now have to pay an extra £1,330 in taxes over the next two years. Prentice continued: "Before the last election the Tories produced bogus claims about Labour's tax plans. Yet the very people they promised to protect in their election advertising are being hit by Tory tax rises. In his constituency election address in 1992, the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, said '*Only the Conservatives believe in keeping taxation down top give incentives to enterprise and investment'.* Now, he is the biggest tax raiser in living memory. The Government's record on taxation is simply grotesque."

Note to Editors: The Conservative advertising campaign featured a teacher, a clinical nurse, a computer operator and an electrician. This is what they will have to pay:

- A teacher scale 1 rate A on £12,480 per year will now pay £785 extra tax under the Tories when the Tories claimed that under Labour the bill would be £405

- A clinical nurse on £13,250 will pay an extra £791 when the Tories claimed that under Labour the bill would be £479

- A computer operator on £15,000 will pay an extra £811 when the Tories claimed that under Labour the bill would be £647

- An electrician on £13,500 will pay an extra £794 when the Tories claimed that under labour the bill would be £503

Under Labour's actual tax plans at the last election each of these wage earners would have received a tax cut and would have been £82.15p a year better off.

The Tory Tax Diary. This is what it looks like:

January 94	Excise duty on alcohol: table wine up 2p a bottle, sparkling wine up 4p a bottle, cider up 1p per two litre bottle
April	First pay cheque - Personal Allowances frozen at 1992/3 levels Married Couples Allowance frozen at 92/3 levels National Insurance tax - 1p increase
May	Mortgage due - Tax relief limited to 20%
June	2nd quarter Gas and Electricity bills - fuel tax at 8%
October	Premium tax on car insurance - payment up 3% Premium tax on home contents insurance - up by 3%
November	Excise duty on tobacco will be increased by at least 3% in real terms Duty on road fuels will be raised on average by at least 5% in real terms
December	Christmas holiday makers pay Air Passenger tax - £5 for European Flights and £10 elsewhere
April 95	Married Couples Allowance reduced to 15%
May	Mortgage due - Tax relief limited to 15%
June	2nd quarter Gas and Electricity bills - Fuel Tax at 17.5%
November	Excise Duty on tobacco increased by at least 3% in real terms Duty on Road Fuels will be raised on average by at least 5% in real terms

For Immediate Release: 17 January 1994
Number 13/94

NO PRIORITY TREATMENT FOR LEAKIEST WATER MAIN IN COUNTY

The water main in Foulridge - dubbed the leakiest mains in Lancashire by local MP, Gordon Prentice - will not be a priority for replacement says North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher. He told the MP the company was *"reluctant to bring forward our programme for the duplication of the existing main at this stage".* The MP said the statement would come as a big disappointment to everyone in the village.

Prentice said: "I told Sir Desmond last month that the water main bursts at the drop of a hat. It burst twice in 1988, once in 1991, once in 1992 and no fewer than three times in 1993. Now I am told the frequency of bursts only now justifies a replacement. Incredibly, other schemes *"with a higher rate of interruption"* are still awaiting firm dates for work to begin on them."

"This is cold comfort indeed. Sir Desmond tells me that other mains bursts in the village have interrupted the water supply for a small number of customers but these incidents had *"confused the situation and given the impression that the main along Skipton New Road has burst more often."* What an incredible performance!"

North West Water told the MP it was trying to improve the reliability of the existing supply by either reducing water pressure in the area or reducing the size of the main which would allow the company *"to slip-line the pipework along part of Skipton Road".*

"Sir Desmond has undertaken to get back to me within the next two weeks to let me know the results of his investigations."

For Immediate Release: 17 January 1994
Number 14/94

PRENTICE ATTACKS AGRICULTURE SPENDING CUTS

Cuts in agricultural spending were condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who was speaking last Friday to the National Farmers Union, Nelson and Colne Branch. He said the cuts in the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HCLA) - announced just over a month ago - would cause long term damage to employment in the countryside and to the rural environment.

He told the Pendle farmers: "HCLA is paid to some of the poorest farmers in the country to compensate them for the permanent hardships they face in some of the most remote parts of the country. In 1992, the Government cut HLCAs for the first time ever and the further cut announced at the end of November threatens the long term future of hill farming. Other rural economic activities such as tourism depend on hill farming. The allowance for a hardy breed ewe drops 75p to £5.75. The MP told the meeting he was backing moves in the Commons to force a Government re-think."

The MP also tackled thorny topical issues such as the Milk Marque - the planned successor to the Milk Marketing Board and the threat to animal health from imported disease such as Foot and Mouth and Equine Viral Arteritis.

Prentice said: "It was a good meeting which touched on lots of important agricultural issues - from slaughterhouse regimes, GATT and subsidy arrangements to more local matters such as water run-off into streams and watercourses. Like most people who have to earn their living, small farmers have had a pretty raw deal from the Government over recent years."

For Immediate Release: 16 January 1994
Number 15/94

MP BACKS MOVES TO EQUALISE AGE OF CONSENT

The age of consent should be equalised at sixteen says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He plans to vote for an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which aims to legalise sexual relations between consenting males over the age of 16.

The MP said: "At present, it is lawful for a young man of sixteen to have sex with someone of the opposite sex of the same age or older. He can marry, join the army and pay taxes. But if he wants to have a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex he must wait until he is 21 for this to be lawful. Paradoxically, it is lawful for a young woman of 16 or over to have a sexual relationship with another woman."

"In this day and age there is no conceiveable justification for this unequal treatment. The sexual orientation of people is a matter for them and no-one else. The law should not intervene in decisions taken by freely consenting adults - and in this context I mean people of 16 and over."

"Health professionals - from the BMA down - want to see the law changed. This would decriminalise the young people involved - and help stop the spread of HIV and AIDS."

For Immediate Release: 16 January 1994
16/94

MP SLAMS "NAUSEATING DOUBLE STANDARDS"

Revelations last week that Westminster Council has been operating a housing policy specifically designed to change the political balance in "target wards" in favour of the Conservatives was roundly condemned by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, in the Commons last week.

Details of the scheme - set out in a preliminary report of the independent auditor who had been called in over four years ago by concerned residents - showed the council leader, Dame Shirley Porter conspiring with other leading Conservatives in the Government's flagship local authority - to alter the social composition of key wards, vital to future Conservative control. The plan involved keeping council houses and flats empty - despite soaring homelessness - until they could be sold on the open market. The homeless were put into Bed and Breakfast accommodation which cost the council millions. Dame Shirley and the others - including former Westminster councillor and now Tory MP, Barry Legg - could be required to pay back to the council up to £21m, the cost of the scam.

In an angry exchange on the floor of the Commons, the Pendle MP clashed with Environment Secretary, John Gummer, accusing the Conservatives of "nauseating double standards". He said: "The Minister is inviting the House not to rush to judgement yet as far as Westminster Council is concerned the Conservatives never make any judgements at all! There was a deafening silence at the time of the 15p cemetery deal and nothing was heard from the Government when Dame Shirley Porter was sacking senior officers right, left and centre. What will people think of these nauseating double standards? We are invited not to pass judgement where the Conservative flagship of Westminster is concerned but these very same Conservatives rush to judgement at the merest tittle tattle about any Labour local authority."

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1994
17/94

FURY OVER GAS SHOWROOM CLOSURE

The decision of British Gas to close their showroom in Barnoldswick has prompted an angry reaction from Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice In a letter to the company's General Manager, the MP says it is yet another blow for the town which has invested so much time, effort and money in making the town centre an attractive place to shop and work.

The MP said: "British Gas is more interested in generating vast profits than in providing a service to local people. Not so long ago the showroom in Nelson closed. Now it's the turn of Barnoldswick. Where on earth is it going to end? The company reports its profits for the calendar year and the latest set available relates to the year ending December 1992. These show British Gas made a current cost operating profit of £1,429 and a current cost profit after taxation of £475m. And then I am told the Barnoldswick showroom has to close because it is not pulling its weight and contributing enough to the success of the company."

"British Gas has got some explaining to do" fumed the MP.

Note to Editors: The MP's letter reads: *"I appreciate that trading conditions may not be at their best in these recessionary times, but things are not always going to be so bad. British Gas should look at the medium term, when demand will pick up and people will be more willing to spend money again... You say in your letter that the town will be provided with alternative facilities but I am at a loss to know what you mean by this. Perhaps you could let me know what you have in mind. I would also appreciate details of how many showroom closures there have been for each of the past five years and also the trend in the sales of appliances over the same period. I am also interested in knowing how many showrooms you will still maintain elsewhere in towns of a comparable size to Barnoldswick (which has a population of just over 12,000)..."*

Profit for the year ending December 1992 expressed in historic cost terms show an operating profit of £1,678 and a profit after tax of £683m. Historic cost and current cost are accounting conventions relating to how assets are valued (and therefore how depreciation is calculated). British Gas accounts show both.

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1994
18/94

MP TO PRESS GOVERNMENT FOR EARLY START TO WORK ON WEST COAST MAIN LINE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, wants to see an early start to vital upgrading work on British Rail's West Coast Main Line. And he plans to tackle Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, at a meeting next month on the thorny issue.

In a separate move the MP has told the Lancashire Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England that he will be pressing for the entire route to be modernised - whatever the source of funding. The CPRE told the MP that the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, had promised the upgrading of the line but this was later qualified by the Government, saying it would be seeking private sector funding and would be modernising only from Euston to Crewe.

Prentice said: "The story of the West Coast Main Line is a hoary old chestnut indeed. It has been in and out of the fire countless times. I shall be pressing Mr MacGregor for an absolute commitment - insofar as such a thing is possible from this Government - that work will go ahead even if private financing is not forthcoming. Modernising the nation's transport infrastructure should not be made dependent on the availability of private finance. We've seen where that gets us."

Note to Editors: The Lancashire Branch of the CPRE told the MP: *"The sum to be spent on adding an extra lane to sections of the M62 - an estimated £540m - would pay for modernising the whole of the line from London to Glasgow. Indeed, proposed spending on major new roads of some £23 billion contrasts sharply with BR's total allocation of £1 billion for 1994. In our small overcrowded island, it would surely make more sense to favour rail expenditure.... The West Coast Main Line is a vital component in this region's development."*

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1994
19/94

MP PREDICTS SNUB FOR MINISTER

The final report of the Local Government Commission on the future of the North Yorkshire County Council and its district councils is to be published next week and Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, predicts it will snub the views of his next door neighbour, David Curry, the MP for Skipton and Ripon. Mr Curry is the Local Government Minister in charge of steering the reforms through the House of Commons.

The Commission - the body charged by Parliament to make proposals to the Government on redrawing the local government map of England - has been buffeted by blasts of criticism over its handling of the review. The Pendle MP said: "It has recommended two tiers of councils in some places; a single tier in others and a confusing hotch potch of authorities of very different sizes."

"I don't know what is going to emerge from the North Yorkshire review but if it proposes a link up between Craven and Lancashire's Ribble Valley I shall eat my hat. This was the completely off-the-wall proposal made a few months ago by the Local Government Minister himself - in a breach of all established protocol. I wrote to the Prime Minister about Mr Curry's public remarks and, predictably, got a limp reply. I have also written to the Chairman of the Commission, Sir John Banham, asking for his views on the propriety of the Minister's intervention and I await a reply. There are conventions that have to be scrupulously observed and I intend to see they are."

"People simply do not want gigantic local authorities. If, as I suspect, there is a drastic reduction in councils in North Yorkshire coupled with the abolition of the county council, people there will rightly be outraged" said Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 24 January 1994
20/94

"CURRY IN A PICKLE" AS COUNCIL REVIEW AXES NORTH YORKSHIRE

Local Government Minister David Curry has been given a slap in the face by the Local Government Commission whose review of North Yorkshire is published today. The Skipton and Ripon MP provoked an outcry last November when he publicly urged people in the Craven District of North Yorkshire to lobby the Commission for a link up with Ribble Valley across the border in Lancashire.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency lies alongside Mr Curry's ridiculed the final proposals which will put Craven into a new unitary "West Riding" stretching through Harrogate and down past Selby into Boothferry in North Lincolnshire. A little over two months ago Mr Curry described the merger of Craven and Harrogate *"a dead duck"*. The Pendle MP commented: "The duck is alive and quacking and even larger than before!"

Prentice said: "North Yorkshire County Council is to disappear in a puff of blue smoke and Craven Council is set to become part of this giant new authority stretching down to Lincolnshire! Does he agree with the Craven Herald newspaper when it said last week that the Government couldn't be *that stupid* to agree a unitary authority on these bloated boundaries. If this goes through the word *'local'* in local government will cease to mean anything. People in Craven have every reason to feel absolutely outraged."

"The Commission's decision to reject the Local Government Minister's preferred solution - which was for a ludicrous and hasty shotgun marriage between Craven and Ribble Valley - puts him in a real pickle. Is he going to throw the report in the dustbin? Is he now going to change his mind and welcome it? I intend to raise the matter in the Commons."

"The Commission has humiliated the Minister for Local Government whose views have not even deserved a footnote."

Note to Editors: The Commission's final report now goes to the Secretary of State for the Environment who will give the Government's response. Whatever then emerges goes to Parliament for approval. The Commission recommends reforming the two tier system of two county and 17 district councils with

seven unitary authorities in North Yorkshire and Humberside. The present two tier system in Lincolnshire is retained.

The Commission's report to the Secretary of State *"recognises that Craven, alone among North Yorkshire Districts, has a majority wishing to keep the present arrangements. However, people in the area identified more strongly with Yorkshire and the Ridings than with the district council area and there was inadequate support for it to become a unitary authority - which in any event at 50,000 population would be very small."*

Mr Curry told the Craven Herald in November that the Local Government Commission's proposed merger of Craven and Harrogate was *"a dead duck"*. He said York was *"virtually certain to get its own all purpose council and Harrogate is big enough at least to be able to put up a good case to manage its own affairs".* He then proposed the merger of Craven Council in Yorkshire and Ribble Valley in Lancashire saying their respective County identities would not suffer.

For Immediate Release: 24 January 1994
21/94

END "MEDIEVAL PRACTICES" says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today called on the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to abandon the "medieval practices" which transfer to the Duchy the estates of those who die without making a will in the County Palatine (the old Lancashire boundary). The MP told William Waldegrave in the Commons today that apart from Lancashire and Cornwall (where estates go to the Duchy of Cornwall) the assets of those who die intestate go to the Exchequer.

Prentice said: "There is a clear and compelling case for getting rid of this anomalous throwback to the Middle Ages. In 1991, £938,597 was scooped up by the Duchy from people who had died in the County without leaving a will and, after deductions for expenses and the like, £531,715 was available for distribution to worthy causes in the County."

"I paid a generous tribute in the House today to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for intervening at my request to reverse a decision of the Duchy's Benevolent Fund not to grant aid the Lancashire Free Legal Advice Centre who needed the money to buy updates for their law library. It was only after I left the Chamber that I found out that Mr Waldegrave chairs the Committee that dishes out or withholds the cash in the first place!"

"I see that the Committee includes people such as Major Sir Shane Blewitt KCVO, Sir Michael Bunbury and Sir Robert Morritt. Worthy and honourable men, I am sure, but how did they get there? Who appoints them? What special qualities to they bring to the job? What qualifies them to dispense hundred of thousands of pounds of other people's money to worthy causes?"

Note to Editors: The history of the Duchy of Lancaster goes back to the 13th century. Since 1399 this estate passed to each reigning monarch with the Duchy revenues providing a source of income separate from other Crown inheritances. This separate identity was preserved when in 1760 George III surrendered the revenue from the Crown Estates to the Government in

exchange for the Civil List but retained the Duchy of Lancaster revenues. Contact: Gordon Prentice MP 071 219 4011

mbargoed: 25 January 1994
22/94

PENDLE MP TURNS THE HEAT UP ON CURRY

Local Government Minister, David Curry, has been told by Labour MP Gordon Prentice not to get involved in any way in formulating the Government's response to the Local Government Commission's final report on North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire nor in the forthcoming review of Lancashire.

Prentice whose constituency lies alongside the Minister's Skipton and Ripon has tabled a Commons motion today which claims Mr Curry should disqualify himself from considering these reports on the grounds he had already made up his mind.

Prentice said: "It is simply not on for the Minister with direct responsibility for the local government review to rush into the public print urging people to support his own preferred solution, while dismissively ruling out alternatives. It is not enough for him to say (as he has done) that he will not be involved in decisions affecting local authorities in his own constituency. His comments have tainted the entire review of North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire and prejudiced the one on Lancashire which is now getting under way."

Note to Editors: The MP's Early Day Motion reads:

> "This House notes that the Minister for Local Government publicly advocated the merger of Craven and Ribble Valley councils at a time when the Local Government Commission was in the process of reviewing North Yorkshire; that he publicly described a possible merger of Craven and Harrogate as "a dead duck" and, on the grounds he is prejudiced and has already formed a view, believes he should take no part in the Government's consideration of the Local Government Commission's final report on North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire published on 24 January 1994 nor in the final report on Lancashire which will be submitted in due course."

For Immediate Release: 27 January 1994
23/94

PRENTICE SLAMS HOUSING MINISTER OVER MP's COUNCIL HOUSE PURCHASE

The sale of a £300,000 council house in Westminster to Conservative MP for Rutland and Melton, Alan Duncan, has the tacit approval of Housing Minister, Sir George Young, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP provoked a furious reaction from the Government benches in last night's debate on housing when he invited the Housing Minister to

condemn the millionaire MP's purchase of the council house in Gayfere Street, 400 yards from the House of Commons.

Prentice said afterwards: "The council house sales policy was never designed for this. It is a scandalous abuse of the system for this millionaire MP to accept a £50,000 discount from Westminster Council and buy his 78 year old neighbour's house, giving this elderly man an assurance that he could live there for the rest of his days. Mr Duncan said this was a long term investment. I find it quite unbelievable that something so blatant and so manipulative is not condemned unreservedly by the Housing Minister. He reserves his disapproval - as he did at last year's Conservative Party Conference - for young single women who, apparently, get pregnant to jump the housing queue. This claim has been shown to be wholly fictitious whereas Mr Duncan's council house purchase is established fact."

The MP went on to urge the Government to make more help available to local authorities in North East Lancashire where, he said, much of the housing stock was decrepit, "falling to bits and collapsing around people's ears".

For Immediate Release: 25 January 1994
24/94

TORY THREAT TO AIRPORT SECURITY

The Government is threatening airport security by weakening existing regulations and failing to implement improvements promised after the Lockerbie disaster according to local MP Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP said: "As part of its deregulation drive, the Government is planning to reduce airport security and passenger safety. Their Transport Deregulation Task Force told them airport security was too 'belt and braces' at high cost to the industry. So the Government is set to reduce security.

"That may be why they haven't kept the promise they made after the Lockerbie disaster to strengthen the regulations to stop baggage getting on to a 'plane unless it can be matched to a passenger. Today, five years after Lockerbie, they still haven't tightened up the rules.

"As a result of all this, no fewer than 5,839,000 people flying from Manchester Airport in the last year were still at risk of unaccompanied baggage being smuggled on to their plane. 349,500 flying from Leeds/Bradford were in the same boat - so to speak.

"We in the Labour Party are calling on the Government to keep this promise at least. They must also abandon their plans to water down airport security. People's lives are more important than profits".

Embargoed: 28 January 1994
25/94

GIVE THE BIRDS A BREAK says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing East Lancashire's Ornithologists who are pressing the National Rivers Authority to abandon proposals to move the coarse fishing close season from 15 March - 15 June forward to January/February.

The MP has tabled a motion in the House of Commons urging the National Rivers Authority to think again at its meeting next month when the proposal is to come up.

Prentice said: "The present coarse fishing closed season is also the breeding season for resident and migratory birds and they need a bit of peace and quite during these months. Any change would undoubtedly cause some disturbance and that's the last thing the birds need at that time of year."

"It's time we gave the birds a break" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 27 January 1994
26/94

MP GETS ENVIRONMENT JOB

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been elected to chair the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee for 1994/5. The Committee has a sweeping remit which shadows all the matters dealt with by the Department of the Environment - including local government, housing and planning.

The MP said: "I am delighted to be elected by my Parliamentary colleagues to chair this important committee - especially at a time when so much is happening in this area of policy."

"The first thing we need to get to grips with is the Conservative's appalling review of local government. The Local Government Commission is coming out with unadulterated rubbish after being fed a mish mash of conflicting guide-lines by the Government."

"From the word go, the council review was a recipe for disaster."

Embargo: 1 February 1994
27/94

MP SALUTES COURAGE AND SACRIFICE OF MURDERED EARBY MAN

The House of Commons paid tribute today to Paul Goodall, the UN Humanitarian Aid Worker from Earby, who was brutally slain in Bosnia last Friday. The motion on the Commons Order Paper, tabled by local MP, Gordon Prentice, offered MPs' condolences to the murdered man's widow, Denise, and their four young children.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice said: "The news last Friday of Mr Goodall's murder hit us all with the force of a sledge-hammer. Here was a man with no axe to grind. He was simply engaged in the vital task of getting aid through to beleaguered and starving communities. His reward was to be brutally killed by a gang of psychopathic bandits."

"Words cannot express the horror we all feel nor can they comfort his widow, Denise, and their four young daughters."

"Mr Goodall's life will not have been sacrificed in vain if we act purposefully to bring this grizzly conflict to an end. The genocide, the ethnic cleansing, the mass rape and the slaughter of innocent children has to stop - and the UN should use military force as required to make sure this happens. I have been urging the use of air power for almost a year now but all we have had from the Government is endless vacillation."

"We must ensure the objectives set out in the London Conference 18 months ago - when Britain held the Presidency of the European Community - are followed through. The integrity of national borders has got to be respected. Civilian populations must be protected in UN safe havens and the people responsible for these grotesque war crimes should be hunted down and brought to book. These unimaginable horrors are happening on our doorstep in Europe yet we appear powerless to intervene. We must act now."

Note to Editors: The MP's Early Day Motion reads: "That this House pays tribute to Mr Paul Goodall of Earby, Lancashire who was murdered in Bosnia on Friday 28 January 1994 while engaged in providing humanitarian relief for the victims of the conflict; salutes the courage of Mr Goodall and his colleagues David Court and Simon King who were wounded in the attack and sends its condolences to his widow, Denise, and their four young daughters in their tragic bereavement."

or Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
28/94

MP PLEDGES ACTION ON BARROWFORD FLOODING

A weekend walkabout in water sodden Barrowford has convinced local MP that urgent action is needed to resolve the area's susceptibility to flooding. Just before Christmas there was a flash flood which drove people from their homes and caused thousands of pounds worth of damage.

The MP commented: "This area is like the flood plain of the Mississippi. December's flash flood was a one off caused by a blocked culvert and we still need to establish who was responsible for that happening. But the more serious problem concerns the old sewerage system which is plainly inadequate. We also need proper flood protection along Pendle Water and this could involve some dredging."

"I am in touch with North West Water and the National Rivers Authority as well as the local council and I am hopeful that, between them all, there will be a lasting solution.

Prentice said: "We also need to address the insurance problems the people down there have. With so many floods over recent years their homes are becoming impossible to insure. And if they can't be insured they won't sell. It's an appalling catch 22 and we've got to do something about it."

Note to Editors: A public meeting involving NWW, the NRA, the local council and the MP (Westminster duties permitting) will be held in Barrowford on 17 February.

For Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
29/94

COUNCIL REVIEW "COMING APART AT THE SEAMS" says PENDLE MP

News that the High Court has ruled that the Government cannot insist on the abolition of county councils in all but exceptional cases has thrown the Local Government Review into further confusion according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP commented: "The review is clearly coming apart at the seams. An increasing number of Tory MPs are publicly expressing grave reservations about the whole exercise. So far, we've heard rumblings from Richmond's William Hague, Harrogate's Robert Banks and Selby's Michael Alison. All across the country, Tory MPs have got the jitters."

"This review of local government is close to stalling under the sheer weight of hostile criticism. Who knows what lunacies may emerge from the Lancashire Review - which is just getting under way - when we see what is happening across the border in Yorkshire with the proposed creation of gigantic new authorities?"

Note to Editors: The Local Government Commission started its review of North Yorkshire on 28 September 1992. On 19 November 1993, Local Government Minister, David Curry, openly advocated a link up between Craven council in North Yorkshire and Ribble Valley in Lancashire in his column in the Craven Herald newspaper.

The Pendle MP tabled a question to the Secretary of State for the Environment asking if he would *list the occasions "when either he or Ministers in his Department have publicly advocated specific changes in the local government map of England when the Local Government Commission was in the process of reviewing that area."* The Local Government Minister (Mr Curry) replied on 28 January 1994 stating that *"it is the policy of the Secretary of State and Ministers in his Department who will be involved in decisions on changes to local government structure, not to comment on specific changes in an area which the Local Government Commission is in the process of reviewing. I am not aware of any breaches of this policy."*

The Local Government Minister is on record stating that decisions affecting *his own constituency* will not be taken by him but by other Ministers.

For Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
30/94

DON'T PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED

In an move unprecedented in the history of the local press, a Labour MP is publicly calling on one of his local newspapers not to report his views.

MP Gordon Prentice explained: "Instead of loftily pretending to be above the political fray, the Craven Herald would be better off stating publicly that it will, in future, no longer report the views of Pendle's Labour MP."

"Their record in reporting my views about anything is quite lamentable but their handling of the current controversy over local government re-organisation really takes the biscuit. It is a big local issue which is raging away like a bush fire. I have deeply held and well informed views but these are simply not being adequately reported. Indeed, I would readily debate the subject locally, in public, with the Skipton and Ripon MP, David Curry, who doubles up as the Local Government Minister chiefly responsible for this dog's breakfast of a council review."

The MP continued: "It is not as if the paper doesn't hear from me. A few months ago, a rare editorial mentioned my name and confessed their office was bombarded with my faxed press releases. When I later drew attention to the obvious - the fact that they rarely published them - my letter went into the voluminous letters page minus the last paragraph which had been critical of the paper!"

"My 17,000 constituents in the West Craven area - that part of Pendle where the Craven Herald circulates - are entitled to know my views on the major issues of the day - even if the paper chooses not to report them. The people of West Craven deserve better than this rag."

For Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
31/94

FUTURE OF WAR PENSIONS JOBS "IN THE BALANCE" says PRENTICE

126 jobs at the War Pensions Unit in Brunswick Street, Nelson could be lost to Blackpool according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "When I first got news of this bombshell I immediately contacted Michael Bichard, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, who is responsible for the administration of war pensions."

"No final decisions have been made but I am obviously deeply concerned about the whole proposal. We can't afford to lose any more jobs from Pendle."

Note to Editors: In his letter of 25 January, Mr Bichard wrote: "With a reducing number of claims and a new computer system in 1995 the War Pensions Unit is looking at its service delivery to see how work can be better processed.

"One option is to centralise the work currently carried out at Nelson within the War Pensions main operations centre at Norcross, Blackpool. There are currently 126 staff engaged on war Pensions duties at Nelson, but as no final conclusion has been reached as to the relocation I am not in a position to comment on the precise numbers or grades of staff which may be involved in such a move, or when such a move may take place."

"Full consultation has taken place with all relevant Civil Service unions concerning the proposals."

For Immediate Release: 2 February 1994
32/94

PRESSURE EASES IN LEAKIEST MAIN IN LANCASHIRE

North West Water chiefs have told local MP, Gordon Prentice, they plan to cut the water pressure at Foulridge in the hope this will prevent the leakiest main in Lancashire from springing new leaks.

Prentice said: "This is clearly second best as what people in the village want is a brand new main that will carry water from A to B without turning into a colander. I have pressed the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, to bring forward their plans for replacing the main but he tells me there are other mains in worse condition. Like most people, I find this difficult to believe but we have it on the authority of Sir Desmond. The state of the mains system in the North West must be truly appalling."

"I have raised the whole question of compensation for the villagers and I am seeking assurances that the pressure reduction won't mean water dribbling out of taps and shower heads. That would really be the last straw."

Note to Editors: Sir Desmond told the MP that a computer model had suggested the pressure cut could work. In a letter dated 25 January. he he wrote: "I confirm we have carried out a desk top study using a computer model which has shown that we could reduce the water mains pressure by about 5 metres. We intend to prove this by pressure logging on site. It the pressure can be reduced the reliability of the main will be increased.

"With regard to slip lining the existing main, this is not an option. The cost of this work, whilst maintaining supplies to the village, would be approaching the cost ol a new main and we are reluctant to invest this capital at the present time for the reasons explained in my last letter."

We will ol course review the timing ot our capital work in Foulridge should the main fracture again, but our expectation is that we ean reduce the likelihood of this happening.

For Immediate Release: 10 February 1994
33/94

NORTHWESTMINSTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on the BBC North West regional Parliamentary programme this Sunday, 13 February.

Northwestminster is on air from 2pm - 2.30pm.

For Immediate Release: 3 February 1994
34/94

MP TACKLES YORKSHIRE ELECTRICITY CHIEFS OVER BARLICK SHOWROOM CLOSURE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, tackled Yorkshire Electricity chiefs last night on the company's showroom in Church Street, Barnoldswick, which closed nine months ago and is still empty. The decision to pull out of Barnoldswick last year provoked a furious row.

After the meeting with the company's directors at Westminster, the MP said: "Yorkshire Electricity's decision was the start of a slippery slope and we now have a problem with British Gas who want to do precisely the same thing. These are magnet shops that draw people into the town and we cannot afford to lose them."

"The decision of the utilities to cutback on their retailing operations will have a ripple effect on all traders. I am writing to the Environment Secretary to find out what assessment the Government has made of the economic and social effects of these pull-outs on small and medium sized towns. Clearly, the planning system needs to take account of these trends."

For Immediate Release: 7 February 1994
35/94

CLAIM THAT DEPRIVATION "WORSE IN BOURNEMOUTH THAN PENDLE" IS RIDICULED BY PRENTICE

Urgent changes are needed to the way in which cash from central government is distributed to local authorities says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP is furious that the formula used by the Government to allocate the money puts Bournemouth higher in the list of deprivation than Pendle.

Prentice commented: "The Government has become detached from reality if they believe genteel, seaside Bournemouth is 40th in the list of most deprived areas and Pendle is 92nd!" This defies the evidence from our own eyes."

"The Government uses an inadequate and incomplete range of criteria to assess relative deprivation which ignores, for example, levels of car ownership, the number of people with long term illnesses which affects their ability to get out and about, the number of homes without central heating and so on. If these were included we would be getting extra cash from the Government instead of losing it."

"The system is absolutely indefensible when all the local authorities in North East Lancashire will be losing out in the year from April 94. I shall be pressing for an urgent review."

Note to Editors: Last week, the Government forced through Parliament the 1994/5 financial settlement for all local authorities in England. The Pendle MP told the House of Commons that the settlement was "savage" for North East Lancashire and for Pendle. The Government said the Council should spend 7% less next year (from April 94) than in the current year.

The Social and Economic Index measures deprivation. (1 is most deprived; 500 is least deprived.)

For Immediate Release: 7 February 1994
36/94

MP HAILS LOW PAY INITIATIVE BY BISHOP OF BURNLEY

Last Friday's conference on low pay in East Lancashire, organised by Hyndburn Borough Council and supported by the Bishop of Burnley, the Rt Revd Martyn Jarrett, has been hailed as a first rate initiative by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP - who sat in on the morning sessions - said afterwards: "After only a couple of days in his new job, the Bishop bravely ventured into this controversial area. It was unfortunate the Government Social Security Minister (Alistair Burt) who had promised to speak, pulled out at the last moment and, despite every effort by the organisers, no other member of the Government could be found to step into the breach. In the event we had thoughtful and stimulating contributions from my colleagues, Frank Field MP and Mike Hindley MEP."

Prentice continued: "North East Lancashire is a notorious low pay blackspot which was graphically confirmed last year by Channel 4's *Cutting Edge* . This programme drew attention to the scandal of low pay in Pendle, Burnley, Blackburn and Preston. We also have the evidence of the Manchester Low Pay Unit which showed that in five Job Centres in Lancashire in September 1992, 11.4% of jobs were offering £2.60 an hour or less and 85.5% were at £3.60p or less. I know from people coming to my own surgery that things haven't got any better since then and the scandal of poverty pay is still rife in the area."

"When my colleague Peter Pike raised the issues in the Commons last October he was told by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment, Ann Widdicombe, *"it makes no sense at all, in a time of recession, to try to eliminate low pay if the result is no pay."*

"Given these views - and the undertaking given by the Minister to visit the area to discuss low pay with the people living there - it was most unfortunate indeed that the Conservative case for low pay went unspoken."

Note to Editors: Pendle Borough Council jointly sponsored the initiative.

For Immediate Release: 10 February 1994
37/94

MP WARNS SUNDAY TRADING BILL COULD FOUNDER

Moves to liberalise the law on Sunday trading - which would allow all shops to open on Sundays for a specified number of hours - were thrown into fresh doubt last night following votes in the House of Commons on key employment protection and premium payments clauses.

Just before Christmas, the Commons voted in favour of partial deregulation of Sunday trading - removing the antiquated distinctions of the 1950 Shops Act

which, for example, make it unlawful to sell a bible on a Sunday but lawful to sell a pornographic magazine.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who voted for the restrictions on Sunday trading to be eased, was scathing about those who voted for deregulation but against safeguards on employment protection.

"I have absolutely no objection to shops opening on Sundays but there must be no compulsion on shopworkers. It should be entirely voluntary and there should be premium pay. We have to ensure that job applicants who do not want to work on Sundays are not discriminated against. And those who are in work must not suffer any detriment, for example, in promotion prospects because they choose not to work on Sundays."

"I have made it crystal clear all along that I will not vote for this Bill at third reading (the last legislative stage before a Bill becomes law) if I am not satisfied the employment protection measures are watertight."

For Immediate Release: 7 February 1994
38/94

PENDLE MP SLAMS "WASTE AND INCOMPETENCE"

Waste and incompetence are endemic features of this Conservative Government according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster following the publication of the Public Accounts Committee report on the serious failures in administrative and financial systems and controls within Government Departments and other public bodies.

The MP said: "The Government can waste millions without apology and then lecture the rest of us on financial prudence. They force councils like Pendle into a financial straightjacket and then allow quangoes to squander public money without batting an eyelid. The PAC report is an astonishing catalogue of waste."

"In addition to all this waste and incompetence we are seeing the criminal neglect of our manufacturing industry. Rover is now bought out by BMW of Germany and leaves Rolls Royce and Reliant as the only British owned car manufacturers. The President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, has been talking as if the German takeover is a great victory."

"He obviously believes the bigger the whopper, the greater the chance of people believing it. But this is what he said in his 1987 book Where There's a Will: *"It is simply not an option for the British Government to tell the country's motor industry to make its own way in the world... An ominous development has been an increase in foreign ownership and control. Foreign investment and interest is, of course, to be welcomed, but control has its dangers. For the major parts of the British motor industry to fall entirely into foreign hands would leave it a hostage to decisions in Detroit, Paris, Turin and perhaps Tokyo."*

ends

Note to Editors: The report cites, amongst others, the following examples of waste:

Waste and incompetence jibe

- Wessex Regional Health Authority wasted at least £20m on a regional information systems plan which they subsequently abandoned.

- West Midlands Regional Health Authority wasted £10m due to shortcomings in the financial control and accountability of their Regionally Managed Services Organisation.

- The Department of Employment engaged consultants in a haphazard way. The report questions whether the taxpayer got value for money from the £11m spent of this.

- The breakdown of the Property Services Agency financial system meant they could not recover £65.6m from customers.

Other examples of waste abound:

- In 1992, the last year for which figures are available, the amount of uncollected tax that was written off was a staggering £1.6 billion - double the previous year. The fuel tax will raise £950m in this, the first year.

- £450 has been spent on implementing and then continually re-writing the national curriculum.

- £30m was wasted on the abortive move of the prison service HQ to Derby

- £2.1m was spent on a Parents' Charter leaflet.

For Immediate Release: 8 February 1994
39/94

MP DUBS RED TAPE BILL "A CONSTITUTIONAL OUTRAGE"

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill which promises to cut red tape has been dubbed "fraudulent" and a "constitutional outrage" by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP told the Commons this week that the Bill contained "Henry VIII" clauses which gave absolute powers to Government Ministers to ride roughshod over Parliament. "This Bill gives Ministers the power to repeal and amend primary legislation with the stroke of a pen. It is a constitutional outrage."

"The Bill will allow privatisation by stealth with major public service organisations being moved into the private sector without the need for detailed debate in Parliament. The Bill shows a contemptuous disregard for process and procedure."

The MP told the House: "The Government's so called *Deregulation Task Forces* looked at 3,500 regulations of which 71% have been introduced since 1979.

No fewer than 21% - just over one fifth - have been introduced since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990. It is ludicrous for the Government to suggest that regulations are a spillover from a socialist past."

"The Conservatives are responsible for most of the red tape they are now making such a song and dance about repealing."

For Immediate Release: 9 February 1994
41/94

CURRY PULLS OUT OF KEY DECISIONS ON COUNCIL REVIEW

The Minister for Local Government and Planning, David Curry MP, will not be involved in the Government's decisions on the Local Government Commission's recommendations for Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. It is yet to be settled whether he will be involved in the Commission's recommendations on the future council map of Lancashire and Cumbria.

The news comes after months of painstaking probing by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency lies alongside Mr Curry's Skipton and Ripon.

"Last November, Mr Curry was openly calling on people to support a Craven/Ribble Valley link up and at the time he said he would not be involved in decisions affecting his constituency. I have now winkled out this admission that he will not get involved in any decisions affecting three English Counties - rather wider than a mere constituency - and that is as it should be. He can now say whatever takes his fancy."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP tabled a Parliamentary question to the Secretary of State for the Environment asking what additional guidance he intended to give to the Local Government Commission on the conduct of the Review following the High Court decision on Lancashire on 28 January. John Gummer replied:

"The review of local government in England and the work of the Local Government Commission will continue. The Government is not appealing against the court ruling, which makes it clear that the Local Government Commission exercises its own judgement - something that has never been in dispute. The Commission's reviews will continue of the basis of the policy guidance issued in November 1993 with the omission of the final sentence of paragraph 3. The aim of the Local Government review continues to be to provide effective and convenient local government which takes account of community identities. The Government believes that unitary authorities will often be the best way of achieving these objectives. In those cases they will be able to reduce costs and improve the quality and co-ordination of services. They will therefore
often provide the best form of local government. Decisions will be taken on Commission recommendations in that light. However there is no national blueprint and the Government does no rule out consideration o£ two tiers in particular circumstances, with or without changes to the status quo, where a strong case for that is made."

Embargoed until: 12 February 1994

42/94

OPEN GOVERNMENT MINISTER TOLD "PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH"

The Minister for Open Government and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, William Waldegrave MP, has been told by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to practise what he preaches and open up meetings of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster to the public.

The Open Government Minister, who chairs the secret meetings, told the Pendle MP that "*Meetings of the Duchy Council and of the Trustees of the Benevolent Fund are held as and when necessary to deal with relevant business. These meetings are private and the Minutes are only available to those who are present."*

The Minister was replying to an earlier letter from the Pendle MP requesting a calendar of meetings and for sight of the minutes of meetings held over the past twelve months.

Prentice commented: "You could have knocked me over with a feather duster when I read the letter. I intended going along to one of these meetings to find out precisely what is discussed. For a Lancashire Member of Parliament to be told by the Minister for Open Government of all people that he can't observe the meetings of the Duchy of Lancaster is, quite frankly, unacceptable."

"I have tabled an Early Day Motion which will appear on the Commons Order Paper this Monday (14 February) when the Chancellor of the Duchy will be answering questions in the House. The Order Paper will also carry a question I tabled earlier asking what the Chancellor is doing to make the Council of the Duchy more representative of the population of Lancashire in terms of gender, race and social class. But Mr Waldegrave's letter raises an even more fundamental issue - open government."

"The Duchy Council is stuffed full of old Etonians, meeting in secret
to disburse hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money. The Duchy has more in common with the freemasons that with an elected local council of the type the Conservatives are so fond of rubbishing."

"My Commons motion calls on the Minister to open the meetings of the Duchy to the public, publish minutes and follow the custom and practice of democratically elected local authorities."

ends

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP's EDM reads:

> "This House deplores the practice of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster, chaired by the Minister for Open Government and Chancellor of the Duchy, of meeting in secret, "as and when necessary" with minutes circulated only to those present to consider important matters including the distribution of hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money and calls on the Chancellor of the Duchy to open the meetings to the public, publish minutes and follow the custom and practice of democratically elected local authorities."

The Membership of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster is as follows:

William Waldegrave MP, Chancellor of the Duchy (Eton)
Timothy Lloyd QC, Duchy Attorney General (Winchester)
Major Sir Shane Blewitt KCVO, Duchy Receiver General (Ampleforth)
Mr Justice Morritt, Vice Chancellor of the County Palatine (Eton)
Sir Michael Bunbury Bt (Eton)
Sir Simon Towneley KCVO (Stowe)
Prof Christopher Howes CB (Gresham's)
Mr J. R. Sclater (Charterhouse)

Embargo: 11 February 1994
43/94

PENDLE MP VOTES TO BAN TOBACCO ADVERTISING

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will vote today to ban tobacco advertising. He will support Kevin Barron's Private Members' Bill aimed at reducing smoking among young people.

Gordon Prentice, said: "The Tobacco Advertising Bill will definately cut smoking among young people. We know that adults cut back - probably becuase of ever rising tobacco taxes. But what has happened to children's rates? No significant change has been reported by OPCS. Of 15 year olds, 24% were smoking regularly in 1982 and 23% were regular smokers in 1992. The decision to smoke is made by the age of 15 for more than 80% of smokers. It is not a decision taken in adulthood as a mature choice."

"If young people start smoking it is incredibly difficult to shake the habit. And if they can't then premature death and disease follow as sure as night follows day. Estimates published after the last General Election by the Health Education Authority showed that of the 1,099 people a year who die in Pendle, 205 die from diseases caused by smoking.

"503 Pendle people a year are admitted to National Health Hospitals because of illnesses caused by smoking. These patients used an average of 25 hospital beds every day at an annual cost to the NHS of £1.05m."

For Immediate Release: 10 February 1994
44/94

PENDLE MP WELCOMES ACTION ON LIBERAL DEMOCRAT RACISTS

News that racist Liberal Democrats in Tower Hamlets face suspension from their Party this coming Sunday has been welcomed by Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

The Lib Dem councillors have been given an ultimatum. Unless they accept the findings of the internal inquiry that found the leaflets they produced had pandered to racism, they would be out on their ears.

The MP said: "At long last, the high command of the Liberal Democrats seems to be taking a grip. For as long as I can remember, the Lib Dems - and the Liberals before them - have run their Party as a kind of franchise operation - allowing people in every little town and village in the land to do and say exactly what they please. They scavenge for issues to take up which they think will win them local political advantage. Wider principles rarely come into it."

"A few months ago, I was disappointed to see a long standing member of the Pendle Liberal Democrats accuse those members of his Party who were calling for disciplinary action against the racist councillors in Tower Hamlets - as indulging in *political correctness*." *

"We know how the Focus leaflets work. We can live with all the hype, froth and invention which is their trademark. What I won't accept from anyone is that it is OK to pander to racism to win grubby votes that aren't worth having in the first place."

Note to Editors: See PR 9/94. 11 January - Lib Dem Whitewash on Racist Leaflets. *See*The Guardian* 17 November 1993

For Immediate Release: 14 February 1994
45/94

PENDLE MP APPLAUDS ACTION ON LIB DEM RACE LEAFLET ROW

News that the Lib Dem Branch in Tower Hamlets at the centre of the racist leaflet row has backed down from confrontation with the Party's leadership has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Tower Hamlets Lib Dems had been accused of using their Focus leaflets to pander to racism. The Party's London Executive told the branch it had to accept the findings of the internal Party inquiry that investigated the matter and, in future, submit its leaflets to the Party leadership for vetting.

The MP said: "This whole business leaves a very nasty taste in the mouth. It is in no-one's interest for any political party to encourage racism - least of all the Liberal Democrats whose record has, until now, been a good one."

"I was very sorry indeed to hear a Lancashire County Councillor and leading Liberal Democrat activist dismiss the whole business saying any attempt to discipline the people involved was just indulging in political correctness."

"I hope we can now draw a double line under this unfortunate affair."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP tabled the following Commons motion on Thursday 10 February: *"That this House applauds the action of the Liberal Democrats' London Region in issuing an ultimatum to the Liberal Democrat councillors in Tower Hamlets to accept the findings of the internal party inquiry which found that Focus leaflets pandered to racism; but regrets that purposeful action to root out racism in the Liberal Democrats has been dismissed by the Liberal Democrat Lancashire County Councillor, Tony Greaves, as 'political correctness'."*

For Immediate Release: 14 February 1994

46/94

"LIFT THE FATWA AGAINST SALMAN RUSHDIE" says PENDLE MP

On the fifth anniversary of the issuing of the fatwa against *Satanic Verses* author, Salman Rushdie, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called on the Government to redouble its efforts to persuade the Iranian Government to lift the death threat.

Prentice has condemned the fatwa as a contravention of international law and of human rights and freedom of expression and in a Commons Early Day Motion has demanded the Iranian Government be held directly responsible for Salman Rushdie's safety.

The MP said: "Rushdie has now been in hiding for five years and unless the fatwa is lifted he will spend the rest of his life wondering where and when somebody is going to kill him. Mr Rushdie has the right to freedom of expression, as does everyone else, and it is quite appalling that his life has been put in jeopardy in this way."

"The Government must continue to apply steady and insistent pressure to get this death threat lifted. We live in a secular society where people must have the right to say what they like about particular faiths - even where it may be considered offensive. I started to read the *Satanic Verses* but gave up after a few chapters. I found it dense and impenetrable. I also know that some people find it offensive and blasphemous but that is no reason why it shouldn't be published."

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994
47/94

COST OF CRIME SOARS IN LANCASHIRE

Since 1988, the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in Lancashire has soared by a staggering 83% according to figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The amount stolen per household in Lancashire in 1988 was £130.20p. In 1992 this increased to £237.70p.

Prentice said: "We should take no comfort from the fact that our increase is slightly lower than the average for England and Wales (94% increase). What we are seeing across the country is a horrifying increase in crime under the so called Party of "law and order".

"The spiralling increase in crime in our county literally costs a fortune. Insurance premiums have increased massively. For example, Royal Insurance was reported last year to have increased its premiums for households by an average of 20% over the past two and a half years. And now the Conservatives are adding a 3% Insurance Premium Tax to bills for house insurance, car insurance, insurance against redundancy and many others."

"The plain fact is that Government policies make people more insecure. They then encourage people to take out private insurance against their failings. And, finally, they tax them when they do."

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994
48/94

NORTH WEST CLEAN UP NEEDED

Shock figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show the quality of the environment in the North West is nose-diving. On almost every measure of environmental neglect, the region has the dubious distinction of being at the bottom of the list.

Prentice commented: "After 14 years of Conservative Government, the North West has the worst bathing water; the worst river quality, the highest concentrations of lead in the blood and the most derelict land. What a chilling catalogue."

"Exposure to lead can have adverse effects on the way in which children's intelligence and behaviour develops. People are exposed to lead via the air (though this is declining due to lead free petrol), through water (due to lead piping) or food (through plants which have absorbed lead through the air or from fertilisers)."

"It's time the Government cleaned up its act. The North West gets the wooden spoon for far too many measures of environmental neglect."

Notes to Editors:

Bathing Water Quality - percentage of identified bathing beaches failing to comply with EC Bathing Water Directive:

Rank	Region	%
1	Anglia	6%
2	Wessex	8%
3	Yorkshire	9%
4	South West	13%
5=	Wales	24%
5=	Southern	24%
7	Northumbria	41%
8	North West	67%

Quality of Rivers and Canals - percentage poor or bad

Rank	Region	%
1	Northumbria	3%
2=	Welsh	6%
2=	Wessex	6%
4	Thames	7%
5=	Southern	8%
5=	Anglia	8%
7	Severn Trent	12%
8	Yorkshire	15%
9=	South West	19%

9=	North West	19%

Concentrations of lead in Blood: The third and fourth columns show the regional rankings for men and women respectively

Rank	Region	Men	Women
1=	East Anglia	4	1
1=	Inner London	2	3
3	Northern	1	5
4	South East (outside London)	7	2
5	Outer London	5	5
6	Wales	3	8
7	South West	6	6
8	East Midlands	8	9
9	Yorkshire/Humberside	11	7
10	West Midlands	10	10
11	Scotland	11	12
12	North West	12	12

Derelict Land. This land so damaged by industrial or other development that it is incapable of beneficial use without treatment. Derelict land can pose a public health hazard and increase development pressures on greenfield sites. The public has a right to know which areas of land are contaminated. Following pressure from the Labour Party, a legal obligation for local authorities to compile a public register of contaminated land was included in the 1990 Environmental Protection Act. Almost four years later, the Government has still not implemented this.

Rank	Region	Area (hectares)
1	East Anglia	600
2	Greater London	1,400
3	South East (ex London)	1,800
4	East Midlands	4,400
5	West Midlands	5,600
6	South West	5,800
7	North	5,900
8	Yorkshire/Humberside	6,100
9	North West	8,800

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994
49/94

FLAGSHIP LEGISLATION "TAINTED BY FIRMS GIVING TORY PARTY MILLIONS"

"Flagship legislation on deregulation which goes into Committee today for detailed line by line scrutiny has been tainted by *"Task Forces"* loaded with

paying supporters of the Tory Party, claims Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says influence is being bought.

"The Deregulation Bill aims to review up to 7,000 regulations, many of which concern public safety, but which are criticised by Ministers for adding to business costs. Last year seven task forces were established to trawl through all the current laws. Their reports, which cost the taxpayer £120,000, are not to be made public. Ministers appointed leading industrialists to the committees from 12 firms which have donated a total of £3.5m to the Tories.

The Pendle MP's analysis of the membership of the *"Task Forces"* shows:

- 12 companies made a total of 88 donations to the Tory Party worth £2.8m

- 55 donations to four key Tory organisations were also paid worth nearly £700,000

- 4 of the 7 committees are actually chaired by people from Tory-donor companies

Prentice - who is a member of the Commons Committee scrutinising the Bill, commented: "These *Task Forces* excluded representatives of consumer organisations like the National Consumer Council, Passenger Users Councils or any of the Utilities' Consumer Councils. There are no consumer representatives on the deregulation task forces because businesses who pay the Conservative Party have taken their places."
"For example the Committee examining construction regulations is chaired by Chris Spackman, MD of Bovis whose parent company P&O has paid nearly £1 million to the Tories. (see 3 below)

"For the Conservatives, deregulation is about more than cutting unnecessary red tape. It is about allowing companies the freedom
to exploit, to drive wages lower and to worsen terms and conditions."

At its first morning session today, the Pendle MP told the Deregulation Bill Committee that when the Wages Councils were abolished last August people were told it would free up the labour market and have no effect on wage levels. "Michael Heseltine has told us that deregulation will be a liberating and invigorating force. He should tell that to people in the North West where the Manchester Low Pay Unit has just published an authoritative survey of wage levels in industries which used to be covered by the now abolished Wages Councils. Wages have fallen through the floor. Not a very liberating experience" said Prentice.

Note to Editors:

1. The seven Deregulation Task Forces cover Construction; Financial Services; Transport and Communications; Food Drink and Agriculture; Engineering Industries; Tourism and Other Services and Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals.

2. In addition to direct donations, task force businesses have been paying Conservative MPs and peers. Jerry Wiggin MP, is consultant to British Sugar who are represented on the Food Task Force. David Howell MP is paid by the Swiss Bank Corporation which is on the Finance Task Force). Tim Smith MP was

paid by Price Waterhouse (Finance Task Force) prior to becoming a Minister this year. Jack Aspinwall MP is paid by BAA (on the Transport Task Force). Sir Geoffrey Pattie is paid by GEC which is on the Engineering Task Force. And Lord Peter Walker is paid by Dalgety - represented on the Food etc Task Force.)

3. Other Tory donors well represented on the Construction task force include MacAlpine, Slough Estates and Norcros plc. Mr Spackman told New Builder magazine (2.4.93) *"We have to be drastic - for example killing off the building regulations".* Does this mean, for example, that the requirement to insulate new houses could disappear? Home insulation firms don't know because they haven't been consulted."

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994
50/94

PHOTOCALL

EARBY COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL
1.30pm on Wednesday 16 February

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting Earby County Primary School, Bailey Street, Earby at 1.30pm, tomorrow, Wednesday, 16 February 1994, at the invitation of Miss Vicky Lee, one of the pupils, to look at the School Science Exhibition "All Change".

For Immediate Release: 16 February 1994
51/94

PENDLE JOBLESS RISES SHARPLY

The number of people in Pendle who are unemployed and claiming benefit increased sharply last month. Figures released today (Wednesday) show that 2,968 people in the area are searching for work while claiming unemployment benefit.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "We are on the up escalator again. Our unemployment rate is up to 7.9% compared with the December 1993 rate of 7.4%. There has been a small increase in the number of vacancies at Colne Job Centre (115 from December's 96) but a corresponding decrease at Nelson (136 from 153) so it's swings and roundabouts. We also need to look at the type of jobs that are being lost and those that are being created. We need jobs that put a premium on skills."

"As everyone now knows, the way the figures are calculated masks the real number looking for a job."

Note to Editors: In January 1994 in Pendle 2,968 people were out of work and claiming benefit. This compares with the December figure of 2,772.

The 2,968 breaks down as follows: 2,299 men (10.6%) and 669 women (4.2%)

PENDLE JOB WATCH: Jobless totals since John Major became PM
from Gordon Prentice MP

Unemployed	Date	Rate	Colne	Vacancies	Nelson
1708	Nov-90	4.5			
2037	Dec-90	5.3			
2199	Jan-91	5.7			
2286	Feb-91	5.9			
2467	Mar-91	6.4			
2494	Apr-91	6.5			
2548	May-91	6.6			
2608	Jun-91	6.8			
2752	Jul-91	7.1			
2815	Aug-91	7.3			
2762	Sep-91	7.2			
2651	Oct-91	6.9			
2610	Nov-91	6.8			
2684	Dec-91	7			
3001	Jan-92	7.8			
2958	Feb-92	7.7			
2948	Mar-92	7.6			
3020	Apr-92	7.8			
3064	May-92	7.9			
3015	Jun-92	7.8			
3274	Jul-92	8.5			
3355	Aug-92	8.7			
3216	Sep-92	8.3			
2950	Oct-92	7.6	114	Oct-92	368
2822	Nov-92	7.3	110	Nov-92	236
3006	Dec-92	7.8	102	Dec-92	166
3161	Jan-93	8.2	49	Jan-93	160
3031	Feb-93	7.9	91	Feb-93	150
3025	Mar-93	7.8	93	Mar-93	128
2972	Apr-93	*7.9	87	Apr-93	158
2861	May-93	7.6	110	May-93	160
2928	Jun-93	7.8	113	Jun-93	176
3234	Jul-93	8.6	99	Jul-93	142
3237	Aug-93	8.6	121	Aug-93	155
3065	Sep-93	8.1	99	Sep-93	196
2783	Oct-93	7.4	124	Oct-93	349
2719	Nov-93	7.2	105	Nov-93	261
2772	Dec-93	7.4	96	Dec-93	153
2968	Jan-94	7.9	115	Jan-94	136

*change in method of calculating working population

For Immediate Release: 16 February 1994
53/94

BOYCOTT BENETTON says PENDLE MP

The fashion retailer Benetton was today accused of going one step too far with its latest advertising campaign showing the blood splattered clothes of a Bosnian Croat soldier, Marinko Gagro, who was killed last July near Mostar.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose humanitarian aid worker constituent, Paul Goodall, was brutally slain in Bosnia on 28 January described the advertisement as "sick and loathsome".

"They say all publicity is good publicity but, this time, I hope Benetton proves the old saying wrong. After their earlier ads showing a priest and nun kissing, a victim of aids dying, a baby, smeared with blood, still attached to the umbilical cord, I wasn't entirely sure where Benetton would turn next in order to shock us all. Now we know and it is unforgivable."

"I would like to see a consumer boycott of all Benetton shops. They are doing this for cheap publicity and name recognition and not for any higher purpose. They are not saying anything profound about the conflict in the former Yugoslavia."

"They should be ashamed of themselves. But I doubt they will be."

For Immediate Release: 16 February 1994
54/94

PRENTICE CONDEMNS LATEST HIKE IN PRESCRIPTION CHARGES AS "ANOTHER BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed yesterday's 50p hike in prescription charges which puts the cost up by 11.6% to £4.75. The increase follows the earlier one on 2 March last year which pushed prescription charges to £4.25 - then up by13%.

Speaking at Westminster today the MP hit out at the increase which is six times greater than the rate of inflation. "Last year I said the 1993 increase - which was eight times larger than the 1.5% pay norm the Prime Minister was seeking to impose - was a shock. But now "shocks" are commonplace - especially when it comes to tax.

Prentice said: "I entirely agree with Mr Nicholas Wood, the president of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, when he called it a tax on illness.

"It is another bitter pill the nation is expected to swallow."

ends

Note to editors: This is the 16th increase in prescription charges since 1979 when they stood at 20p

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994
55/94

MP WARNS OF "FALTERING RECOVERY"

Recent figures charting the performance of the economy have exposed the weakness of the current recovery says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster today, the MP said: "Over the past few days we have seen unemployment up, manufacturing output flat and a very unbalanced recovery. In Pendle, unemployment in January was sharply up on the month before and nationally the number of people out of work and claiming benefit (the claimant count) in January was 16,000 up on the December level. The so called "claimant count" is now 2,787,600 although the real number of people unemployed is undoubtedly much higher and getting even worse. On the Government's massaged figures, the number of people unemployed is 10.3% of the workforce."

"Manufacturing output is flat. Production figures show that recovery is very patchy. Manufacturing output fell slightly in December and in the fourth quarter of last year only grew by 0.5%."

"The recovery, such as it is, is also unbalanced. The Bank of England in its most recent quarterly inflation report noted that the main force driving the economy is consumer spending. This is confirmed by the most recent retail sales figures which show January retail sales up by 0.6% on December and 3.5% up on January 1993."

"It is this last point that points to the precarious state of the British economy. If consumer spending stalls with the tax hikes in April the economy could begin to contract again with alarming speed. In any event, a recovery based solely on increased consumer spending is undesirable. What we are not getting is an expansion of productive capacity. What we need above all else is more investment in productive capacity and people. We really do need a Business Plan for Britain."

Note to Editors: The increases in taxation could seriously arrest the recovery. The Government was elected on the promise to cut taxes and they have broken that promise. The tax increases are unfair. Though ordinary families will now be paying more tax than they did in 1979, those on £64,000 and above will still be paying less tax than they did in 1979. The taxes, including VAT on gas and electricity, hit hardest those who can least afford it.

The tax increases are to pay the cost of economic failure. They are not to pay for better schools, transport and hospitals - they are all being cut - but for high unemployment and low growth.

The tax burden on a two adult family with one earner, two children and on average earnings shows the family pays more of their income in direct tax than they did in 1979 and more of their income on indirect tax than in 1979.

	1978/9	1994/5
Direct Tax as % of earnings.....	20.9%	21.9%
Indirect Tax as % of earnings.....	11.3%	13%
Total Tax Burden.....	32.2%	35%

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994
56/94

HOPES RISE AS WATER SUBSIDES AFTER BARROWFORD FLOODING

New plans to tackle the problem of flooding in Barrowford have been welcomed by the area's MP, Gordon Prentice. The National Rivers Authority, North West Water and the local Borough council have been putting their heads together to find a solution to the problem which is causing heartache and misery to dozens of families.

The last flood on 19 December 1993 brought thousands of gallons of muddy water cascading into homes leaving them sodden and damp months later.

The MP said: "I am hopeful that things will now start to move. We have been told about the computer modelling of the sewerage network that has been commissioned and we have the plans of the NRA to deal with Pendle Water. In both cases, however, the timetable for carrying out the work is causing concern. North West Water will be able to comment in detail in about three months after it has analysed the computer modelling but they make no promises about getting the necessary work included early on in their capital programme. I shall be applying steady and insistent pressure on both organisations and I know the local council will be doing everything it can to help."

"The critically important issue that is still outstanding concerns insurance cover for properties and contents. If - as had been threatened - some insurance companies withdraw cover then the householders will be trapped in their water sodden homes for years to come while their children develop all sorts of breathing and health problems associated with the dampness. I am waiting to hear from the Director General of the industry's umbrella body, the British Association of Insurers, on what he proposes to do about it."

more follows

Note to Editors: This is the text of a letter, dated 14 February, from North West Water Chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher to the Pendle MP: "Thank you for your letter about flooding in Barrowford. It seems, from contemporary press reports, that there have been flooding problems in the area dating back at least one hundred years.

"I can confirm that the particular incident on 19 December 1993 was caused by debris obstructing the inlet to a land drainage culvert, not the responsibility of North West Water, which resulted in flow passing overground and overwhelming the local sewerage system.

"As you state, there is a relationship between the sewerage system and the river. The sewerage network carries both foul sewage and a large proportion of rainwater from buildings and highways. It is designed to spill excess flows in times of severe rainfall into Pendle Water, via a combined sewage overflow in Pendle Street, which is consented by the National Rivers Authority (NRA). This prevents both flooding in the locality and overloading of the downstream sewers. However, in times of high river flow the overflow cannot operate and there is a risk of the sewerage system being unable to contain all the flows within it.

"I understand that the work the NRA will carry out on Pendle Water will not bring any improvement in the performance of the sewer network and, in extreme conditions, could make it worse.

"A computer model of the sewer network is presently being developed and this will be used to examine the relationship between river level and sewer network performance and to develop potential solutions. The results of this work should be available in about three months. We will be able to indicate some outline options at the meeting on 17 February but our representative will stress the preliminary nature of these.

"North West Water has always regarded relief of property from flooding as a very high priority. This financial year we expect to have removed over 350 properties from the register of properties at risk of flooding and we will be continuing at a similar rate next year. Each case is assessed individually for cost effectiveness and until the cost of resolving the Barrowford problem is defined, it is not possible to confirm its inclusion in the programme. Furthermore, our overall investment priorities for the ten years from 1995 are presently being examined by the Director General of OFWAT, as part of the "Periodic Review" of water companies. Our plans beyond April 1995 will depend on the outcome of the Review.

Embargo: 22 February 1994
57/94

PENDLE MP SLATES "SEXIST" GARDEN PARTIES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging the Queen to cut out the "sexist and anachronistic" practice of inviting people to Royal Garden Parties - with their unmarried daughters, but only if they are aged between 18 and 25.

The MP has again tabled an Early Day Motion in the Commons which asks Prime Minister to have a word in the Sovereign's ear. Prentice said: "Last February, John Major had plenty to say in his Carlton House speech about the dangers of clinging to *"outmoded habits, rules and restrictions"* and if anything falls into that category, this does."

Prentice continued: "Why 18 - 25? Why unmarried? Why just daughters? Why treat Royal Garden Parties in the 1990s like a 1950s Debs Ball? Why on earth continue with a practice so totally out of tune with contemporary Britain? The practice just invites ridicule."

"I am also asking Ministers whether this sort of banality contravenes the Sex Discrimination Act."

ends

Note to Editors: There are three Buckingham Palace Garden Parties this year on 12 July, 19 July and 21 July. The EDM reads: "That this House notes that invitations to Royal Garden Parties are typically extended to "any unmarried daughters who are aged between 18 and 25 years of age" and considers this anachronistic and totally out of keeping with contemporary Britain and again calls on the Prime Minister, in the light of his Carlton House speech of 3 February 1993 when he warned of the dangers of clinging to "outdated habits,

rules and restrictions", to advise the Sovereign to abandon this overtly sexist and discriminatory practice which nowadays is likely to invite ridicule."

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994
58/94

MP PUSHES FOR COMMONS DEBATE ON HARTLEY HOSPITAL

The future of Hartley Hospital in Colne is to be aired in the House of Commons if local MP, Gordon Prentice has his way. He has applied to the Speaker for an early debate on the old hospital which has been empty for years and is now beginning to decay.

Prentice said: "This hospital was was given in trust to the people of Colne by the Hartley family whose name was made famous by their jams. It is now slowly and majestically decaying while the Regional Health Authority scratches around for a buyer."

"Our fear is that bulldozers will suddenly materialise and demolish the buildings before we know what is happening and that a cleared site would have no difficulties in getting planning permission for housing of some other use. I have written to Sir Bruce Martin, the chair of the RHA, seeking assurances on this point."

"I have also been in touch with the Secretary of State for Health asking her to intervene but, typically, she declines to get involved.

"My own preference is for the buildings, which are set in attractive grounds and with beautiful views, to be made over to hospice use but there are other alternatives which merit serious consideration. Whatever else happens, the whole sage deserves to get a good airing."

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994
59/94

CLEVELAND GUEST RESCUE WELCOMED

Colne Engineering firm, Cleveland Guest, which called in the receiver on 23 November last year looks to be safe for the moment according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP met the receivers last Friday to talk through the rescue package which has been underwritten by Lancashire Enterprises and Nat West bank.

Prentice said: "I am obviously relieved that most jobs have been saved and that the firm will continue as a going concern. There are some important issues concerning contracts of employment that are the subject of discussion between the receivers and the trade unions there and we wait to see what unfolds."

"I was also reassured to hear that an independent trustee has been appointed to look after the interests of members of the Pension Fund. This was a matter of some concern."

Note to Editors: Last November the Pendle MP launched a scathing attack on the Prime Minister at question time in the Commons. He told the House the Prime Minister had written to him as recently as 29 July 1993 specifically mentioning Cleveland Guest and wishing them well. The firm promptly went into receivership. At the time the MP said: "Many questions need to be asked about the management and direction of this company but my top priority is to save the jobs of the people who work there. That's the bottom line."

Cleveland Guest are precision engineers manufacturing components for the aerospace and other industries. Its holding company is Habit PLC who manufacture and sell piston rings, diamond tools and specialist services in the precision engineering and construction industries. Its Swedish parent is Darcos Holding AB (Sweden).

For Immediate Release: 22 February 1994
60/94

SCHOOLS RADIO CHANGES WORRY PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has expressed concern about changes to schools radio programmes announced recently by the BBC.

Schools programmes, which are used by an estimated 90% of UK primary schools and represent a vital learning resource for many increasingly hard-pressed local schools, are presently broadcast between 9.00am and 10.25am on Radio 5. The BBC, however, has announced that it is moving the programmes to make way for the new "Radio 5 Live" news and sport network. From April, they will be broadcast between 2.00pm and 3.00pm on Radio 3FM.

The MP said: "I am worried about the effect these changes will have. First, they will reduce by a third the number of hours of schools programmes, which are in the finest tradition of the BBC's public service remit.

"Secondly, I am concerned that the new afternoon slot may not suit schools as well as the present morning one. The BBC says that schools which find the new time inconvenient should tape the programmes for use at a time more suitable for them - but this assumes that all the primary schools in Pendle have the time, staff, and equipment to do this. The BBC admits that live broadcasts of concerts on Radio 3 may run into the time allocated for schools programmes."

"I have therefore written to every primary school head in Pendle, asking what effect these changes will have on their schools and whether they are concerned by the lack of consultation taken in making the decision. I will take the matter up with the BBC if the
results of this survey show that the new time is not convenient for our local schools.

For Immediate Release: 23 February 1994
61/94

IT'S ALL CHANGE AT THE PALACE says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has withdrawn his Early Day Motion which he tabled at the Commons earlier this week following news that invitations to Royal Garden Parties will, for the first time, be extended to the unmarried *sons* and daughters of guests - provided the offspring are aged between 18 and 25.

Until now, the invitations were only extended to guests' unmarried daughters - and then only if a certain age.

The MP said: "I suppose this is progress of sorts. But why do they need to be unmarried? And why this age discrimination?"

"The Royal Garden Parties are probably very quaint affairs but I'm not entirely sure what purpose they serve - or what the unmarried daughters and sons (aged between 18 and 25) are supposed to get out of the experience."

Note to Editors: There are three Buckingham Palace Garden Parties this year on 12 July, 19 July and 21 July. The EDM reads: "That this House notes that invitations to Royal Garden Parties are typically extended to "any unmarried daughters who are aged between 18 and 25 years of age" and considers this anachronistic and totally out of keeping with contemporary Britain and again calls on the Prime Minister, in the light of his Carlton House speech of 3 February 1993 when he warned of the dangers of clinging to "outdated habits, rules and restrictions", to advise the Sovereign to abandon this overtly sexist and discriminatory practice."

For Immediate Release: 23 February 1994
62/94

MP SLAMS CUTS IN BOSNIA TROOPS

News that redundancy notices are to be served on 7,000 British troops tomorrow - including soldiers serving in Bosnia - has brought a sharp reaction from Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"It is simply incredible that redundancy notices - some of them compulsory - are being served on soldiers on active duty. The defence cuts are being carried through in an ill-considered, scissors and paste, fashion by a Government that personifies waste and incompetence."

"The Labour Party is committed to reducing defence expenditure but this should follow a full Defence Review where all the options are properly examined. What we have at the moment is the worst kind of ad hocery."

"This is a Government that wasted £160m on the ridiculous secret bunker under the Ministry of Defence. The entrance was so small that all the equipment destined for the bunker had to be taken to bits and then re-assembled inside. And then there was the scandal of the foreign practice shells which were bought by the MOD that didn't work at all. Not even the tiny explosion they were designed to make."

"The Government's record on real, live shells is just as bad. The Government turned prevarication and hesitation into an art form while deciding whether or not to give firm orders to Royal Ordnance in Blackburn."

For Immediate Release: 28 February 1994
63/94

MP BLASTS "QUANGOLAND"

The growth of quangos - the unelected bureaucracies now running many of our public services - has been blasted by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster earlier this week, the MP said: "When the Tories came to power in 1979 they pledged to sweep away quangoes and restore powers to local people. Yet again, they have done precisely the opposite to what they promised."

"Quango spending is now three times higher than in 1979. It has risen 20% faster than inflation. And quangoes now control one fifth of all public spending - £47000 million in total - and have no fewer than 40,000 members. This compares with the 25,000 County and District councillors."

The MP continued: "Decisions that affect the real lives of ordinary families on hospital closures, the future of schools and colleges and training opportunities are being taken behind closed doors by unelected people. Quangoes and central government have now taken direct control from locally elected people of over £4,500 million in spending in the fields of education, transport and urban development. Local elected people now have no say at all in the running of two vital services - training and health which, between them, spend £19,600 million a year."

"The whole thing is getting completely out of hand."

Note to Editors: The Conservatives will not publish information on donations to the Tory Party by individuals who are appointed to quangoes. We can only find out by looking at company accounts if the firm of which they are a director or chair is a contributor. Examples are ten a penny. The chairman of British Nuclear Fuels until recently was Sir Christopher Harding, the chairman of BET, which gave £25,000 to the Tories in march 1993. He is also a non executive director of Hanson, which gave £100,000 to the Conservatives in 1992.

For Immediate Release: 28 February 1994
64/94

PENDLE MP APPLIES FOR A NEW JOB

Gordon Prentice, the MP for Pendle in North East Lancashire, has applied for a new job - as a member of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster. He has written to the Chancellor of the Duchy (who doubles up as Minister for Open Government) asking for the job which he intends to run in tandem with his responsibilities at Westminster.

The MP said: "The Duchy of Lancaster distributes hundreds of thousands of pounds every year to organisations in the County yet the meetings where the decisions are taken are held in secret and the minutes are circulated only to

those present. For this practice to be defended by the Minister of Open Government is faintly absurd."

"After months of poking around, and after making a nuisance of myself by asking lots of awkward questions, I have discovered that Sir Simon Townley, the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire - whom the Chancellor describes as one of his principal advisers on how this cash is distributed - has not attended a single meeting of the Duchy Council since 1987. As Sir Simon is obviously an incredibly busy person, I have therefore asked Mr Waldegrave if I can attend as Sir Simon's substitute when he cannot attend meetings."

The MP said: "The Duchy of Lancaster is a throwback to medieval England and no-one really knows how it works. I am just lifting the carpet and having a look at what is underneath."

Note to Editors: The MP's letter to Mr William Waldegrave MP, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for Open Government, reads:

"You already know of my interest in the affairs of the Duchy and I am writing to ask if you would consider appointing me to serve on the Duchy Council.

"I see from recent replies you have given to Parliamentary Questions tabled by me that one of your principal advisers on applications for financial assistance from the Duchy's Benevolent Fund is the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, Sir Simon Townley KCVO. You tell me that the Benevolent Fund was constituted as a charity in September 1993 and that the Trustees have met once since then and that, prior to that date, advice had been given at Council meetings.

"Since 1988, you tell me there have been 16 meetings of the full Council and the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire has not been present at one. He is obviously an incredibly busy person and I wonder if you would considering allowing me to act as Sir Simon's substitute when he cannot make it along to a meeting.

"This would have the additional advantage of allowing me access to the minutes of Duchy Council meetings which are only circulated to those attending the meetings. And I would also be informed of when meetings were due to be held - something that is currently secret."

For Immediate Release: 1 March 1994
65/94

COMMONS URGED TO PROTECT CONSUMERS FROM BOARDROOM EXCESSES AND PROFITEERING

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, urged the House of Commons this week to block the utility regulators from taking over some functions from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The MP is critical of the failure of the utility regulators, such as OFWAT and OFFER, to curb massive profiteering and soaring boardroom payouts.

An amendment to the Deregulation Bill has been tabled in the key House of Commons Deregulation Committee.

Committee member, Gordon Prentice MP says: "The utility companies such as electricity and water have been milking the public. In the North West, what has been going in is nothing short of a scandal. Some of the people who chair the utility companies have seen their pay triple - in spite of doing the same job as before privatisation."

"Last year, electricity profits rose by almost 27%, while privatisation has pushed up prices more than two percent above inflation but electricity consumption actually fell. No wonder. Many people can't afford to heat their home. Water companies have been soaking their customers. Average rises since privatisation have been up to 25%. Customers are paying for all these profits and massive pay rises."

"In the electricity industry, 57 executives are getting £18.2 million in post-privatisation share options, while consumption has actually fallen. In the water industry, 48 bosses of the ten privatised companies have already cashed in share options of £4.5 million. Prices have risen by up to 25%."

"The amendment the Opposition will be moving will stop the regulators taking over the powers of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, pending a review of their powers. It is vital that the regulators show their ability to put consumers before utility shareholders before Parliament gives them any new powers. I am pressing the Minister to ensure that consumers get better representation from the utility regulators. "

Note to Editors: Last year the Pendle MP complained that customers throughout the North West had been "comprehensively ripped off by NORWEB ever since privatisation. We pay £43.36p a year in standing charges even before a single plug gets within striking distance of a socket. Even more of a scandal is the level of remuneration and perks for Norweb's top people. The accounts for last year (1992) show the chairman, Kenneth Harvey, salary increase from £105,135 in 1991 to £184,643 in 1992 - a ballistic increase of £1,529 per week. In 1993 his salary jumped from £184,643 to £208,287 - an increase of £23,644. £20,00 of this was dubbed a "performance related bonus".

The salary increases should be seen alongside the generous share options the Norweb Directors have awarded themselves. Kenneth Harvey has (at March 92) 157,629 share options (up from 108,080 share options at March 91) and three of his fellow executive directors have 80,187.

They can exercise their right to buy shares under the *Executive Share Option Scheme* for £3.11 between February 1994 and February 2001. If this scheme were operating today, the chairman of Norweb would make £266,393 straight profit on shares bought at £3.11 per share and sold at today's price of £4.80.

Executive Directors of Norweb and their interests

	Shares at March 92	Options at March 92	Shares at March 92	Options at March 91
K.G. Harvey	5,357	157,629	5,357	108,080
A. Crowder	7,142	-	7,142	-
B. Benson	5,455	46,430	5,455	46,430

M.G. Faulkener	7,525	82,158	7,525	56,633
G.P. McTague	500	-	-	-
A. Simmons	3,567	80,187	3,567	54,662
B.J. Wilson	2,351	80,187	2,351	54,662

Source: Norweb Financial Review 91/92.

On 10 December 1993, the Financial Times reported: *North West Water, the privatised utility, yesterday announced a 6 per cent increase in interim pretax profits to £138.2m and a slightly higher than expected dividend...*
The UK regulated water business showed a 16 per cent increase in operating profits to £168.3m. Turnover rose by 7 per cent to £369.6m. There was a £4.6m decline in industrial and commercial volumes.

For Immediate Release: 2 March 1994
66/94

FURY AS PENDLE MP LASHES "SLOPPY AND SLIPSHOD" MINISTER

The Minister for Open Government and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, William Waldegrave MP, has been blasted by Gordon Prentice, the MP for Pendle, for giving him incorrect information about the attendance record of the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire at meetings of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The furious MP said: "I have been campaigning for absolutely ages to get the veil lifted on the work of the Duchy of Lancaster - a body responsible for distributing over £500,000 of public money every year. On the basis of information given to me by Mr Waldegrave in an official reply to a Parliamentary Question of mine, I publicly called on the Minister to allow me to attend meetings of the Duchy Council as substitute for Sir Simon who, allegedly, never attended. Mr Waldegrave has now admitted the information he gave me was wrong."

"I have today written to Sir Simon to apologise for the embarrassment caused to him as a consequence of the incorrect information given to me by the Chancellor of the Duchy and I have again called on the Minister to publish the Minutes and allow me - a Member of Parliament for a Lancashire constituency - to attend meetings of the Duchy Council."

"The answer I received was a sloppy and slipshod piece of work. How many other mistakes has he made that have not, as yet, come to light?"

"If the minutes had been published in the first place this would never have happened" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: The following is the text of the letter sent by the Pendle MP to Mr Waldegrave today:

more follows

"Sloppy and slipshod" Open Government Minister

The letter reads:

"Contrary to the reply you gave in answer to an earlier Parliamentary Question of mine, you now tell me that the attendance record of the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire at meetings of the Duchy Council is 100%.

"This mistake of yours has horrified and embarrassed me and, I dare say, Sir Simon Towneley who featured prominently in the Lancashire Evening Telegraph this week denying the charge I had made that he never attended meetings of the Duchy Council. I have now written to Sir Simon to apologise for the embarrassment caused by the incorrect information you gave me.

"Surely this whole episode precisely illustrates the point I was making. If the minutes of the meetings of the Duchy Council had been available, and were not secret, this would never have happened.

"All this is now water under the bridge but I would ask you - as Minister for Open Government - to allow me, as a Member of Parliament for a Lancashire constituency, to sit in on meetings of the Duchy Council. And I would again urge you to publish the minutes.

Note to Editors 2: Grants to Pendle people from the Duchy Benevolent Fund for 1993 amount to £714 - £150 to an invalid in Colne, £500 to a handicapped person in Barnoldswick and £64 to another handicapped person in Barnoldswick. The Pendle MP commented: "£714 out of half a million for Lancashire isn't a lot. Pendle, after all, is one of only 14 local authorities in Lancashire. A lot of money will no doubt be going to county wide organisations and I am checking this out."

The Pendle MP asked the Minister to list all the organisations located within Pendle that had received grants from the Duchy since 1974. He was told by the Minister that collating this information would "entail disproportionate cost". The MP was given the 1993 figures (above).

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1994
67/94

MP CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO BACK AEROSPACE

The future of the country's aerospace industry is being put in jeopardy by the Government's unwillingness to give it the backing it needs to survive in a competitive world market, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP was speaking in last night's key debate on the future of British manufacturing in the wake of the decision of British Aerospace to sell Rover - the last British volume car manufacturer - to the Germans.

Michael Heseltine, the President of the Board of Trade, who opened the debate by saying the aerospace industry was *"a triumph"* was ridiculed by Prentice who accused Conservative members of *"existing on a different planet and operating in another dimension where they see things that other people do*

not see. They see growth, productivity and a booming economy where the rest of us just see dust."

The MP told the House that Rover was taken over by BMW of Germany because British Aerospace had said it needed capital to develop the core aspect of its business - aerospace itself. Yet the Government doubted that the cost or availability of finance were more difficulties for manufacturing companies - a fact, said Prentice, directly contradicted by British Aerospace.

"Rolls Royce doesn't get half of the support its major competitors in the United States receive from the US Government. And the "launch aid" it gets from our Government - and which is dressed up as a big hand-out - actually comes in the form of a loan which has to be paid back. The Government's track record in building our vital manufacturing base is truly appalling" said Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1994
68/94

PRENTICE SAYS NO HALF MEASURES

Moves to outlaw short measures are to be voted on in the House of Commons Deregulation Bill Committee today. Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, is dead against Government proposals to legalise short measures in pubs.

Before the 1992 election, the Government promised to outlaw short measures for beer drinkers. Now, Ministers have caved in to pressure from the brewing industry which donated nearly £2 million to the Tories. A survey in December carried out by West Midlands Trading Standards officers showed that in 21 pubs surveyed 85% of the pints were short - containing as much as 10% below a full pint. Recent surveys in London and Gloucestershire show the same.

The Pendle MP, who is a member of the Committee, says: "Ministers are legalising short measures for over 20 million beer drinkers who drink a total of 256 million pints every year. For years drinkers have had to put up with short measures. This is a disgraceful betrayal of consumers who are being forced to pay for a full pint but receive only 95% of a pint. Imagine if people were told they would only get 95% of the pint of milk they paid of, or only 11 eggs when they bought and paid for a dozen!"

"The price of beer has already risen by 25% above inflation in the past decade. Before the 1992 general election, the Consumer Minister, Edward Leigh promised action. In an official DTI press release (5.3.92) he said: "I strongly believe that consumers should get what they pay for, if a pint is ordered, a pint of liquid beer is what they should get."

The DTI told British glass manufacturers in 1985 to gear up to supplying measured glasses. Paul Edwards of Dema International of Derbyshire advised the DTI in March 1993 that they had spent £150,000 on new moulds and a further £28,000 on associated costs. He says: "The £178,000 is a non-recoverable cost." The largest glass manufacturer in the UK Ravenglass has spent nearly £1 million on retooling equipment and on new moulds. They had intended to take on 100 extra staff to make the new glasses. Some breweries have already introduced measured glasses. Wolverhampton & Dudley say they

save money suppling larger 24OZ glasses because Trading Standards Officers don't have to calibrate their glasses. Instead their pumps deliver the measured pint which TSOs accept.

Prentice added: "Government dithering and now this U-turn has thrown the business into chaos. Companies have wasted large sums to prepare for this. What a shambles! The real losers are consumers and British glass companies and brewers who acted in good faith. Ministers have bowed to outside pressure from one vested interest group and changed their mind. They are not fit to hold office."

Note to Editors: Labour's Shadow Consumer Minister Nigel Griffiths MP says: "Of the 11 members of John Major's Deregulation Committee which recommended legalising short measures, two are from breweries (S&N group & Whitbread) who donated over £700,000 to the Tory Party. I am asking members of the Committee of Privileges to investigate the undesirable influence big companies are having on the business of the House of Commons. "

"Other brewery donations to the Tories are as follows: Allied Lyons £1,096,000, S&N £413,000 and Whitbread £297,000. A further nine breweries gave the Tories over £40,000 - the Vaux Group, Fuller Smith & Turner, Hardys & Hansons, Daniel Thwaites, Hall & Woodhouse, McMullen and Son's, Everards, Heavitree and Shepherd Neame."

"I believe the Tories did a deal with brewers before the last election. They were so desperate to buy their way back to power that they promised their brewer backers they'd drop their pre-election promise to beer drinkers. In return the Tories got big campaign donations."

"The 1989 Parliamentary Register of Members' Interest shows that the Deregulation Minister Neil Hamilton who is responsible for this measure was a paid consultant to the Brewers' Society, the major lobby organisation against the full pint."

Labour has the support of the Consumers Association (071 830 6000) and CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale representing small breweries and beer drinkers. CAMRA Campaign's Manager Stephen Cox (0727 867201) says: "The Government has decided to ignore consumer groups and trading standards officers. It has changed its policy twice in three years. The government are caving in to the usual vested interest."

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1994
69/94

GRANADA ON SUNDAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on Granada Television's Granada on Sunday this Sunday, 6 March to talk about the unfolding scandal of Boardroom pay and perks.

Granada on Sunday is on air at 12.25pm.

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994

70/94

MP CALLS FOR "REBALANCING" OF THE MAGISTRATES BENCH TO COUNTER TORY BIAS

People with Conservative Party leanings dominate the Magistrates' Bench even though most people in the area in which they sit support the Labour Party, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was commenting on the analysis, published last week by his colleague, Stephen Byres MP, which showed that in a random sample of 17 areas, in every case the Conservatives have a higher percentage of support amongst magistrates than amongst the electorate and the Labour Party has, in every case, a lower level of support amongst magistrates than the electorate."

In Pendle, 79% of all magistrates expressed a political preference. 56% leaned to the Conservatives yet 40% of Pendle people voted Conservative at the last General Election. 28% of magistrates leaned to Labour yet 44% of people voted Labour in Pendle in April 1992. Only amongst the Liberal Democrats is there any kind of match. 16% of magistrates leaned to the Liberal Democrats and the Lib Dems took 15% of the vote at the General Election."

The MP continued: "Changes to the criminal justice system have undoubtedly persuaded many public spirited Labour inclined people to stay well clear of the Bench and we have also had a number of well publicised resignations. For people to have faith in the magistrates courts and in the justice they dispense, they must believe and accept that the Bench broadly reflects the spread of mainstream political opinion in the area. The figures for my area and for the country as a whole show this not to be the case."

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994
71/94

FUTURE OF HOSPITAL IS STILL "UP IN THE AIR" says PRENTICE

The future of Hartley Hospital in Colne is still uncertain according to local MP, Gordon Prentice, but he has been assured there are no plans to demolish the complex given to the People of Colne by the Hartley family, made famous and wealthy by their jams.

The Pendle MP has been told by property chiefs at the North West Regional Health Authority that offers for the old hospital have been pitched at an unacceptably low level. The health authority is now considering the possibility of redeveloping the hospital for residential use. "My office contacted the RHA today about the rumours that have been flying about that the hospital has, in fact, been sold. However, I have been assured this is not the case."

Prentice said: "The RHA has been dithering about the future of this hospital for years now while spending a small fortune allegedly keeping it secure and properly maintained. The cost of keeping the buildings safe and sound has soared from £14,600 in March 1993 to a staggering £37,900 today yet I have grave doubts about how secure the buildings really are - and how effective the maintenance is."

"I have had hundreds of people contact me about this much loved Colne landmark. It is nothing short of a scandal that it is being allowed to rot away before our very eyes. I am pressing the Speaker to give me an early adjournment debate on the whole sorry saga."

Note to Editors: The Chairman of the Regional Health Authority, Sir Bruce Martin, told the Pendle MP on 22 February: "On the marketing of Hartley Hospital, the situation remains one of offers being received but which are either not at an acceptable level in valuation terms or the prospective purchaser has failed to secure the necessary finance.

"Consideration has been given to other ways of enhancing the marketability of the premises. One possible option under discussion is to submit an outline planning application for the redevelopment of the Hospital for residential purposes. No formal decision has however been taken.

"Although the Authority has no plans to demolish the Hospital, I would advise you that the cost of maintenance and security has risen by a further £23,300 since I last wrote to you on the matter in March 1993."

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994
72/94

MP RAPS GOVERNMENT OVER "CRIME EPIDEMIC"

The country is in the grip of a crime epidemic according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. In the North West since 1987, burglaries have increased by 12% and people in the region are now paying 18% more for their home contents insurance. Over the same period, car thefts in the North West have shot up 22% and car insurance costs have leapt by 27%.

Speaking at Westminster on Monday, the Pendle MP said the Government had neglected crime prevention as a key part of a successful strategy to combat crime. "The Government spends a derisory £15.6m on crime prevention out of a total budget for the criminal justice system of £8,800m. That's a measly 0.2% of their total budget - a pathetic 76p per family. Compare that to an average cost of crime of £228 for every family in 1992."

"For all their steely rhetoric, the Government's record on crime is pitifully weak. Crime has more than doubled since 1979. The clear up rate is down. Since 1979, the overall clear up rate has fallen by 37%. Only 20% of burglaries were cleared up in 1992 - and only 17% of cases of criminal damage solved."

"It is an appalling state of affairs when tales of vandalism, burglary and sundry other crimes crop up as regular topics at my constituency surgeries. People are getting angry about crime."

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994
73/94

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY ON THE ROPES says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has returned to the attack over the future of British manufacturing industry. Last week in a hard hitting Commons speech he ridiculed the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, for paying lip service to the needs of industry while allowing ownership to transfer overseas. Last month, Rover, the last high volume British car maker was taken over by the Germans.

Speaking to Labour's Parliamentary Employment Committee this week, the Pendle MP said: "In Pendle we have seen a cascade of job losses in recent years. Nationwide the situation is dire. In 1979, manufacturing accounted for 28.5% of GDP or what we, as a nation, produced. In 1992 it accounted for only 22.3%. Under the Tories, manufacturing employment has fallen by 40% - from over 7.1m people to just 4.2m."

"Manufacturing has borne the brunt of the recession and we now have an unprecedented trade deficit. In 1983, the UK recorded its first ever trade deficit in manufactures of £2.7 billion and by 1992 this had grown to £7.4 billion. The Government has simply run out of excuses. We need to boost demand and supply and reverse a decade of manufacturing neglect with a decade of investment. And I want to see a cultural shift in attitudes to manufacturing. Making things that satisfy people's needs is not only worthwhile in itself. It is essential to secure the nation's future."

ends

Note to Editors: Manufacturing is being hit in three ways. There is a failure to invest. Britain has the second lowest level of investment in the OECD in terms of share of GDP. In 1993, total capital expenditure in manufacturing fell by 1%. Expenditure in pant and equipment (as opposed to buildings and vehicles) fell by 2%. There is a failure to innovate. In 1992, research and development expenditure in general manufacturing rose by only 1.4%. Total R&D employment fell by 5%. Government
assistance to business for R&D in 1992 fell by 5.5% in cash terms. There is a failure to develop skills. Skill levels in the UK are 40% below that of our main trading partners. Less than 40% of 16-18 year olds in the UK are
in full time education and training compared with over 80% in Germany and France.

There has been a failure of strategy at the Department of Trade and Industry under the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine. The coal industry has been destroyed. Pits are being closed not because they are uneconomic but because the Conservative Government has rigged the energy market against coal when it privatised the electricity industry.

The Government has muddled and delayed over its review of the nuclear industry - originally promised for this year but so far nothing has been heard of it.

For two years there has been uncertainty about the possible privatisation of the Post Office. We still wait for a definitive statement of the Government's intentions towards this key public service.

In his 1987 book, Where there's a will, Michael Heseltine said there were three key "platforms for industry" which the Government had a duty to preserve -

steel, aerospace and the motor industry. They have failed on steel. 140,000 jobs were lost on the industry in the 1980s. While the European Union has fined British Steel, Government ministers have handed over £5 billion in subsidies to other European producers.

The Government has failed on aerospace. The industry is Britain's biggest exporter and employs 45% of all professional engineers. The Government's own Aviation Committee has noted that "the level of Government support for research and technology acquisition has declined... the outlook for the British aerospace technology base is giving cause for concern. In 1992, civil R&D expenditure fell by a massive 19.3%.

The Government has failed on the motor industry. We have now lost our last UK volume car manufacturer - Rover - to BMW. There is a a very real fear that the decline of 2.3% in R&D in the motor industry will accelerate .

Embargo: 9 March 1994
74/94

PRENTICE BACKS MOVE TO GIVE NEW RIGHTS TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The House of Commons will have the chance on Friday 11 March to give people with disabilities new rights under law and Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be enthusiastically backing the measure. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is the latest in a long line of measures to address the problem of discrimination against people with disabilities.

Prentice said: "Today (9 March) is the 50th anniversary of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act which established the present employment framework for people with disabilities but, with the passage of time and lack of enforcement, its provisions have lost their bite. Times have moved on. The social and political climate is vastly different from 1944 and it is time to act decisively to end the sometimes blatant - and often covert - discrimination against people with disabilities."

Note to Editors: RADAR adds: Today (9 March) marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, which established the present legal framework within which employment policy for disabled people is formulated. Over the past 15 years a number of reviews of the "Quota" have been instigated but no action has been taken with regards amending or replacing it. Instead, the Quota has been allowed to suffer a long decline over the same period, caused by the lack of enforcement.

- No prosecutions since 1975.

- The proportion of employers complying with the Quota has declined from 61.4% in 1961 to 20.4% in 1991.

- Registered disabled workers comprised 3% of the workforce in 1961, but only 1.3% in 1993.

There is clear evidence that disabled people choose not to register because they do not believe that there will be any benefit for them, rather than because of any reluctance to label themselves.

The future legislative framework for disability policy is surely represented by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which receives its Second Reading on 11 March, the latest in a long line of attempts to introduce anti discrimination legislation for disabled people.

It recognises the fundamental role which discrimination plays in disadvantaging disabled people, and would ban direct and indirect discrimination, as well as requiring employers to adapt the work-environment for disabled people, unless this would cause "undue hardship"

A particular strength of the Bill is that it provides a policy framework which embraces every aspect of disabled people's lives. The difficulty which disabled people have in accessing further and higher education, has an enormous impact on their employment prospects, as does the inaccessibility of public transport and of the built environment and public services generally.

Any measure which fails to provide comprehensive protection and a positive requirement that organisations modify their practices would prove totally inadequate to the task of opening up employment opportunities to disabled people. It is equally vital that an independent, strategic enforcement agency, a Disablement Commission, is established. Without this disabled people will lack the resources to bring cases, and provide guidance in the way that will be required to make the law more than a dead letter.

For Immediate Release: 9 March 1994
75/94

OPEN GOVERNMENT MINISTER DEFENDS LYING TO MPs

The Open Government Minister and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, William Waldegrave MP, told a House of Commons Committee yesterday that Parliament could be told untruths in "very, very exceptional circumstances". Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who clashed with the Minister a week ago after receiving a reply to a Parliamentary Question that was wrong, described the admission as "simply incredible".

"Mr Waldegrave has conceded that it is OK to be economical with the truth or, indeed, tell untruths to Parliament. And this from the Minister of Open Government!"

"I am still waiting to hear from the Minister about his reply to the Parliamentary Question I tabled which stated clearly that the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, Sir Simon Towneley, had never attended any meetings of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster since 1987. This prompted me to call on Mr Waldegrave to appoint me as Sir Simon's substitute! The reply was wrong and the information caused embarrassment to me and, I dare say, Sir Simon - to whom I have already personally apologised."

"In the light of this experience, I tabled last week a further question to the Minister asking him to list those answers to Parliamentary Questions since

1990 that have subsequently turned out to be incorrect. He told me that "such information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost."

"This flippant answer really takes the biscuit. What on earth has happened to integrity in the conduct of Government?"

For Immediate Release: 10 March 1994
76/94

MP WINS COMMONS DEBATE ON HARTLEY HOSPITAL

The future of Hartley Hospital in Colne is to be debated in the House of Commons next Thursday. The hospital which was gifted to the people of Colne by the Hartley family, made famous by their jams, has been empty and boarded up for the past six years while the owners - the North West Regional Health Authority - decides what to do about it.

The Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, made a successful bid for the prized slot in next week's Commons timetable. A Government Minister will be on hand to reply to the debate.

The MP said: "This debate will give me the opportunity to put on the record what thousands of people in Colne feel very deeply. It is their hospital and they don't want to lose it. I am not prepared to see it slowly crumble and decay while the Regional Health Authority dithers about what to do with this beautiful hospital set in attractive grounds."

For Immediate Release: 10 March 1994
77/94

PRENTICE CLASHES WITH MINISTERS OVER "DOLE IN PRISON" REVELATIONS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily with Home Office Ministers in the Commons over revelations in The Times today that some prisoners are getting unemployment benefit and other benefits paid to them while in prison. The MP was concerned that the cash could help finance drug dealing behind prison walls.

The MP told the Commons there was an "easy availability of drugs in prisons" - a fact confirmed by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Stephen Tumin, who recently expressed deep concern about the situation in the privatised Wolds prison.

Prentice said Ministers had known for six years that prisoners had been getting dole payments and, incredibly, they had done nothing about it. The MP said the behaviour of Ministers was an absolute disgrace.

Turning on the Home Office number two, David Maclean, the Pendle MP said he was "all mouth and no action".

Note to Editors: Latest figures from the Home Office show that Drug Trafficking offences in Lancashire have gone up six fold since 1988. In 1988

there were 20 such offences recorded in the County; 51 in 1989; 91 in 1990; 104 in 1991 and 118 in 1992 - the latest year for which figures are available.

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
78/94

ROLLS ROYCE UNIONS PRESS FOR COMMITMENT ON AEROSPACE

Shop stewards from the Rolls Royce plant at Barnoldswick will be meeting local MP, Gordon Prentice, at Westminster this week to get his backing for the 19 key recommendations from the Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee designed to secure the future of the industry.

The unions want the Government to increase aid to aerospace and give more energetic backing to aerospace companies. They also want the Government to do more work on defence conversion.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I am deeply concerned about the future of the country's aerospace industry and the implications for the North West of the continuing contraction. It is not just a loss of jobs we should be worried about but also the erosion of the region's reservoir of skills. In the decade 1981 - 1991 our leading high tech industry, aerospace, has lost 37,600 jobs. Since 1979, the Government has given £458.4 million to Rolls Royce in "launch aid" for new projects - but it all has to be paid back. Backing comes by way of loan, not by way of grant. Companies such as Rolls Royce operating at the leading edge of the new technologies deserve every possible support from the Government."

Note to Editors: In 1981, the aerospace industry employed 185,000 people. In 1984, 164,700; 1987, 158,200; 1989, 163,400 and in 1991, 147,400.

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
79/94

KEEP BRITISH SUMMERTIME says PENDLE MP

Continuing uncertainty over Government proposals to scrap British Summertime and move over to Central European Time have been blasted by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says any change will plunge half the country into darkness in mid morning.

Last October, the Pendle MP voted against a 10 Minute Rule Bill introduced by Conservative MP, Nigel Waterson, to change to Central European Time which would reduce daylight hours in the morning. Since then, there has been press speculation (most notably in the Scotsman on January 10) suggesting the Government hopes to bring forward legislation changing to CET before the summer.

The MP commented: "This is a hare brained proposal which should, quite literally, never see the light of day. Apparently the European Commission is applying pressure on us to introduce Central European Time but with what benefits to Britain? None. Daylight will break in some parts of Scotland at 11am and between 9am and 10am in many other parts of the country."

"If this goes through it will adversely affect millions of people. Postal workers will be fumbling around with flashlights struggling to read addresses on letters. And what about farm workers, building workers and delivery people who will be expected to work in darkness? However, I am most concerned about school children who may be forced to travel to school in darkness. It doesn't bear thinking about."

"The main group of people to benefit will be criminals, lurking about in the shadows."

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
80/94

GOVERNMENT "OUT OF STEP WITH EUROPE" ON SEX EQUALITY says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused the Government of being out of step with women and out of step with Europe when it comes to sex equality. The MP was challenging the myth that equality for women was incompatible with economic recovery.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "Under this Government the UK has had more European judgements made against it for failing to abide by the five equality directives than any other member state.# The UK is bottom of the European childcare league and one of the few European Union countries not to provide for parental leave. We are also bottom of the European maternity pay league. It is an appalling check-list of discrimination against more than 50% of the population."

Prentice added: "There are at least six million women working for poverty pay in Britain. And women lose around £20 billion as a result of sex bias in the labour market. Women are getting a raw deal under this Government."

ends

Note to Editors: #The five directives are the Equal Pay Directive 1975, Equal Treatment Directive 1976, Social Security Directives of 1978 and 1984 and the latest ruling on part-timers.

Only 2% of under threes have publicly funded childcare provision in the UK compared with 50% in Denmark. A recent survey found that two thirds of mothers now required childcare arrangements as opposed to 50% in 1980 (reported on Department of Employment Gazette, August 1993)

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
81/94

RURAL WAGES THREATENED says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called on the Government to abandon its plans to scrap the Agricultural Wages Boards.

Prentice said: "It is a disgrace that this Government is contemplating abolishing the Wages Councils knowing full well that this will create even greater poverty amongst farmworkers and their families. Farm workers are now among the most highly skilled workers in the land yet their hourly wages are 30% below the industrial average."

"Abolishing the Wages Boards will do untold damage to already fragile rural economies. The Agricultural Wages Boards have the support of all sides of the farming industry and the rural population. The vast majority of framers and their unions want the boards to continue. The farmers I speak to do not want a minority in their midst to pay starvation wages."

"The Minister of Agriculture, Gillian Shepherd, has said she hopes to announce the fate of the Board before Easter. It was Mrs Shepherd, when Secretary of State for Employment, who was responsible for scrapping the other Wages Councils. She will meet massive opposition if she attempts to do the same to the Agricultural Wages Board."

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
82/94

CUTS IN FUNDING FOR ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES WORSE THAN EXPECTED says PENDLE MP

Lancashire has seen a cut of over 22% in the amount of money it gets from central government to help teach children whose first language is not English. The grant (known as Section 11 funding) to the County has plummeted from £5,450,000 in 1993/4 to £4,250,000 in 1994/5. The grant was earmarked to help the 30,089 youngsters age 17 and under whose first language is not English. They represent 9% of the total in Lancashire.

Last October, anxious teachers and parents from Pendle lobbied the local MP, Gordon Prentice, at Westminster to press the Government to rethink its policy of cutting funds for ethnic minority communities.

Prentice commented: "These cuts are in line with what we expected but in some areas the reductions are even worse. Places such as Bradford and Dudley face cuts of over 30%. The Government's policy is dangerously short sighted."

ends

Note to Editors: Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 has been an important source of funding of special educational needs, such as language support, for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. In April 1992, the Home Office agreed to fund projects under this scheme in conjunction with the local authorities. The agreement was on the basis of the Home Office funding 75% of the cost of the projects and the local education authority funding 25% and contracts were entered into and projects started.

Last October Prentice said: "Instead of carrying through the agreement, the Government has reneged on it without warning - despite the fact that contracts had been agreed and projects started. The Home Office contribution is to go down to 57% and then to 50% leaving local authorities to make up the difference." Last year, the Pendle MP sought clarification of the Government's

position on S11 and received the following reply from Peter Lloyd MP on 24 May 1993:

Funding for Ethnic Minority Communities

Thank you for your letter of 6 May to Kenneth Clarke seeking clarification about funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. I am replying as the Minister with primary responsibility for this grant.

I should like to emphasise at once that we remain firmly committed to tackling the causes of disadvantage - lack of English being a prime example - which inhibits members o~ ethnic minorities from playing a full part in the social and economic life of the country. We are also very appreciative of the valuable work which has been, and continues to be, carried out by teachers and other staff supported by section 11 grant.

In the light of the above, I hope that you will assure your constituents that it was with much regret that, faced with the general economic situation and the consequential pressures on public expenditure programmes, we were driven to conclude that we would be unable to sustain throughout the next three years the level of expenditure on section 11 grant which we would have wished and which we had earlier planned. As you will appreciate, the economic situation has changed markedly since applications for section 11 funding were invited, and since decisions were taken about the approval of projects and the allocation of grant.

I am glad to say that, despite the severe pressures to which I referred, it has been possible to secure provision for 1993/94 which should be sufficient to enable us to continue to support existing projects at the current level of grant. Unfortunately, overall pressures in the two subsequent years are such that I am afraid that it will be necessary, on the basis of current planning assumptions, to reduce the rate of grant to around 57% in 1994/95 and to around 50% in 1995/96.

I realise how disappointing all of this is both to local authorities, their staff and others such as school governors, and to the communities whom the grant is designed to benefit. I wish that it had not been necessary to reach such unwelcome decisions. As soon as the funding position became clear, I was anxious that authorities and others should be put in the picture at the earliest opportunity, in the hope that the 16 months' notice, which it was possible to give before a reduction in the rate of grant would need to take effect, would be helpful to them in considering adjustment to their own financial planning. However, I certainly do not underestimate the difficulties which face authorities.

Despite the decisions which it has been necessary to take, the section 11 programme remains substantial - on present figures, around £97 million in 1995/96. I have also been anxious that we should work closely with authorities and other interested parties in order to ensure that the available funding achieves maximum benefit for members of ethnic minorities. To this end, we invited them to let us have their observations by the end of March about possible options for administration of the available funding. We are currently considering.the responses. I can assure you of my determination that the available funding should be used as fully and effectively as possible.
PETER LLOYD

For Immediate Release: 16 March 1994
83/94

MP SLAMS "DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT" IN EAST LANCS TRAINING COUNCIL

East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council is running scared of having elected representatives of local people on its board according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP raised the issue with Employment Ministers in the Commons yesterday, arguing the Government should take responsibility for the "mushrooming number of quangoes and the anti-democratic culture they spawn".

Prentice said: "The Training and Enterprise Councils are supposed to be spearheading the nation's training effort, spending millions of pounds every year in the process. ELTEC has a budget twice as large as my own Borough Council. They should be much more accountable in how they spend and manage public money."

The MP urged Employment Minister, Ann Widdecombe, to join him in "unreservedly condemning ELTEC's decision to exclude any elected representatives from the district councils". The MP went on: "The Board would only accept an unelected representative, the Chief Executive of Hyndburn who has many excellent qualities but being elected is not one of them. Why should my TEC, or indeed any TEC, be running scared of people who are elected?"

Prentice said afterwards: "The answer I received from the Minister was entirely predictable. She told me the Leader of Lancashire County Council was on the Board - something I am obviously well aware of. But why should experienced and knowledgeable people holding positions of responsibility in the local councils in the area be systematically excluded? They don't have two heads. There is simply no good reason at all."

The MP will be meeting Tony Cann, the Chair of ELTEC on Friday to discuss this and other training issues.

or Immediate Release: 16 March 1994
84/94

MPs CLASH IN CAR BOOT SALES ROW

A furious clash between Pendle's Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, and his Tory next door neighbour, Ribble Valley's Nigel Evans, about car boot sales engulfed the committee stage of the Deregulation Bill yesterday. Both MPs are members of this key Committee which, the Government says, is looking at ways to cut red tape without cutting back on protection of the public.

The Pendle MP said: "In my excellent regional daily, the Lancashire Evening Telegraph, I am constantly reading about the legislative heroics of Ribble Valley's Tory MP yet the tidal waves promised to his constituents end up as insignificant ripples by the time they reach the House of Commons."

"Almost a year ago he promised early action to curb car boot sales in his constituency on the grounds that they caused aggravation to residents, restricted access for emergency vehicles, were venues for the sale of stolen and counterfeit goods and, in a word, were not regulated by the authorities. I have a sheaf full of press cutting in which he tells us action is imminent yet the fact is, it is all illusory. Nothing has happened and nothing will happen in the near future."

"We are both serving on a Bill which has as its main purpose deregulation - and, indeed, the deregulation of markets. Yet what we should be discussing is a comprehensive Bill to update the entire law of markets, taking into account the recent growth in, for example, car boot sales. People are being ripped off right, left and centre and they are being sold goods which are sometimes dangerous and sometimes stolen. These markets need to be properly regulated but the Government is turning a blind eye."

"It's not on for MPs to promise one thing in their constituency and do precisely the opposite at Westminster."

For Immediate Release: 16 March 1994
85/94

MPs TO SEEK MEETING WITH ROLLS ROYCE AND HESELTINE OVER CRISIS IN AEROSPACE

Workers at Rolls Royce have won the backing of MPs in their drive to secure increased Government support for the aerospace industry which many fear will go the same way as the British motor car industry, with ownership eventually transferring overseas. Representatives of the Rolls Royce unions urged early action on the recommendations of last year's report on aerospace from the Commons Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, was one of over twenty Labour MPs who today met the union reps - including three from the plant at Barnoldswick - at the House of Commons.

The MP told the meeting the Government's response to the closely argued and persuasive Select Committee report was "pathetic". "The Government is closing its eyes to the massive changes that are happening in aerospace and they are not offering enough in the way of practical help. I want to see an early debate on the industry and an early meeting the the Company. I also want a meeting with the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, who used to promise that he would *"intervene before breakfast, before lunch and before dinner"*. He is about to publish a White Paper on Competitiveness and I want to know what he has to say about aerospace - or if, as I suspect, it is ignored entirely."

For Immediate Release: 17 March 1994
86/94

PENDLE JOBLESS HOVERS UNDER 3,000

Last month, 2,922 people in Pendle were out of work and claiming benefit. Of these, 2,283 were men and 639 women. The February figure is 46 down on January and represents 7.8% of the workforce.

There were 74 vacancies at the Job Centre in Colne - down from 115 in January. In Nelson, the figures were static with 136 vacancies in January and 135 in February.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "No-one is fooled by the statistics any more. They are rapidly ceasing to mean anything at all. We know they have been recalculated, recalibrated, massaged and manipulated with one aim in mind - to get the jobless totals down."

"We also know that Pendle, and, indeed, the country at large, is losing skilled, full time jobs and these are being replaced by low paid, low skill and part time jobs."

"We have now reached the stage where the official unemployment figures conceal more than they reveal. Just like this Government."

PENDLE JOB WATCH: Jobless totals since John Major became PM
from Gordon Prentice MP

Unemployed	Date	Rate
1708	Nov-90	4.5
2037	Dec-90	5.3
2199	Jan-91	5.7
2286	Feb-91	5.9
2467	Mar-91	6.4
2494	Apr-91	6.5
2548	May-91	6.6
2608	Jun-91	6.8
2752	Jul-91	7.1
2815	Aug-91	7.3
2762	Sep-91	7.2
2651	Oct-91	6.9
2610	Nov-91	6.8
2684	Dec-91	7
3001	Jan-92	7.8
2958	Feb-92	7.7
2948	Mar-92	7.6
3020	Apr-92	7.8
3064	May-92	7.9
3015	Jun-92	7.8
3274	Jul-92	8.5
3355	Aug-92	8.7
3216	Sep-92	8.3
2950	Oct-92	7.6
2822	Nov-92	7.3
3006	Dec-92	7.8
3161	Jan-93	8.2
3031	Feb-93	7.9
3025	Mar-93	7.8
2972	Apr-93	

*7.9

Colne	Vacancies	Nelson
114	Oct-92	368
110	Nov-92	236
102	Dec-92	166
49	Jan-93	160
91	Feb-93	150
93	Mar-93	128
87	Apr-93	158

2861	May-93	7.6	110	May-93	160
2928	Jun-93	7.8	113	Jun-93	176
3234	Jul-93	8.6	99	Jul-93	142
3237	Aug-93	8.6	121	Aug-93	155
3065	Sep-93	8.1	99	Sep-93	196
2783	Oct-93	7.4	124	Oct-93	349
2719	Nov-93	7.2	105	Nov-93	261
2772	Dec-93	7.4	96	Dec-93	153
2968	Jan-94	7.9	115	Jan-94	136
2922	Feb-94	7.8	74	Feb-94	135

*change in method of calculating working population

or Immediate Release: 21 March 1994
88/94

MP CALCULATES COST OF CONSERVATIVES

The Conservative Government is costing the nation a fortune according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP told a meeting of Labour's backbench Treasury Committee this week that public spending is to be cut in real terms by £3,300 million - or 1.3% - between this year and next.

Prentice said: "It's another broken promise to add to the list. On 30 March 1992, the Prime Minister said: *"If we were going to cut public expenditure we would have done so before (the election) and I don't believe it is economically right. So you can rule out any expectation of that.*"

"Just when the economy needs investment to sustain the recovery and create jobs, the Government is cutting back. They are cutting public sector investment by £2.3 billion (8%) over the next three years and that is £250 million lower each year than they announced even in the last Budget. The Tories have already cut public sector investment by £6.6 billion (18%) in real terms since 1989/90. Support for investment in the private sector fares little better. Support for key technologies in, for example, aerospace has been lamentable. We need to get the message across that investment mean jobs, now and in the future. Astonishingly, Government investment in training will be cut by £119 million next year (5.1%) after cuts of £400 million since 1990/1."

"The plain fact is that the Government makes cuts in the wrong things to spend on the wrong things. They make cuts in housing investment while they spend more on economic failure. They are cutting £300m from housing associations' approved development programme when houses are desperately needed. Yet they allow £1.7 billion to clock up in uncollected taxes - and that's just in one year."

more follows

Note to Editors: Conservative mismanagement of the economy has meant falling tax receipts and a rising unemployment bill. The Government won't tackle the economic causes of a high PSBR, they just make crisis cuts in public spending instead. This is the Government which thought unemployment was a

price worth paying. Now ordinary families are paying the price of unemployment.

Unemployment now costs every family in Britain £20 a week. Every person unemployed costs the Exchequer £9,000 a year. Overall, unemployment costs the nation around £25 billion a year. That is half the total public sector deficit.

For Immediate Release: 21 March 1994
89/94

MP TELLS HEALTH CHIEFS "DON'T SELL HARTLEY HOSPITAL"

The MP at the centre of the controversy over the sale of the Hartley Hospital in Colne has told regional health chiefs not to sell the site to the Simonstone based builders who want to build luxury flats on the site. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today formally requested the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority to put a stop on the sale pending a full review of the planning issues he detailed in last week's Commons debate.

The MP told Sir Bruce: "Hartley Hospital is in designated green belt land and, as such, any redevelopment is covered by circulars issued by the Department of the Environment on the use of redundant hospital sites. This would seem to rule out any redevelopment for housing purposes if there is another acceptable use as, indeed, there is. The position is reinforced by Pendle Borough Council's own planning policies for the site."

The MP also asked Sir Bruce if the purchasers were made fully aware of the planning constraints on the development of the site.

Prentice said: "The issues raised by me in the Commons have not be satisfactorily answered by the Health Minister and I want a full and thorough review of the entire matter. And I want the sale to the builders stopped. The sale cuts across Government policy on the use of redundant hospitals in the Green Belt and it runs directly counter to the planning policies of the local planning authority - Pendle Borough Council. The Department of Health's own code on the disposal of surplus NHS property has been disregarded and all this has been done in the rush to complete the sale before I could raise the issue in the House."

"Sir William Hartley would turn in his grave if he knew what was happening to the hospital he gave to the people of Colne."

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Number 01/94

PAY MORE AND GET LESS

1994 will be the year when Pendle families pay more and get less according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. In a New Year message to the local Labour Party, the MP claims Norman Lamont and now Kenneth Clarke have started a snowball of tax rises for the British people.

Prentice said: "It's time the Conservatives were honest about taxes. Having won an election telling people they would cut taxes they have now announced the biggest tax hike in British history. The Chancellor has admitted the increases are the equivalent to a staggering seven pence on income tax." (Treasury Select Committee, 15 December 1993).

The MP continued: "These swingeing increases in taxes are not little blips in a graph. They will make a significant difference to the standard of living of millions of people. In the first full year of these tax increases, a typical family will lose over £500 - or £10 a week. In the second full year this will rise to £832 or £16 a week."

"The Budget had some good ideas - although these were the ones pinched from the Labour Party. The Government conceded some help for childcare although it stopped well short of the comprehensive support which we have been calling for. Our campaign for nursery places for all three and four year olds whose parents want it has yet to persuade the Government to act despite the Prime Minister's rhetoric."

"They closed some tax loopholes but left others gaping open. Why don't the Tories do something about the millionaires who claim they are not British domiciled but who have the benefit of living here and making money in Britain. Asil Nadir, the millionaire and contributor to Tory Party funds, fell into this category until he jumped bail and fled to Cyprus."

more follows

"One third of all estates inherited that are worth over £1 million pay no inheritance tax at all" said the MP.

Note to Editors: As a result of the Conservative's two 1993 budgets, a typical family will pay the following additional taxes from April 1994. (Note. All these taxes have legislative force. They are not speculative.)

Tax Outgoings	every week	every year
National Insurance Contributions - up 1p	£3.19	£165.88
Mortgage Tax Relief - relief cut to 25%	£2.24	£116.48

Married Couples Allowance - frozen and cut to 20%	£1.85	£96.20
VAT on domestic fuel at 8%	£1.29	£67.08
Single person's allowance - frozen	£0.34	£17.68
Extension of 20p tax band	£0.38(-)	£19.76(-)
Excise Duties - over indexation	£0.79	£41.08
New Insurance Tax and airport tax - October 94 (full year cost £31.20)	£0.60	£15.60

From April 1995 some of these taxes will go up again:

VAT on domestic fuel now up to 17.5%	£1.53	£79.56
Effects of changing allowances and 20p band	£1.65	£85.80
Mortgage Tax - relief again cut. This time to 15%	£2.24	£116.48
Excise Duties - over indexation	£0.67	£34.84

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Number 02/94

PRENTICE TO PRESS FOR EARLY COMMONS DEBATE ON FUTURE OF THE POST OFFICE

The future of the Post Office - destabilised by continuing uncertainty over whether or not it is to be privatised - is likely to settled later this year according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Last month, the MP pressed Leader of the House of Commons and Government business manager, Tony Newton, to make time available for an early debate on the future of what Prentice described as "this national institution paralysed by Government uncertainty and drift". Newton refused to give any commitment.

Prentice commented: "We need an early statement on the Government's intentions and, so far, the silence is absolutely deafening. Last year I had an enormous postbag on this issue which is of obvious concern to thousands of

people here in Pendle and millions nationwide. I have had no fewer than 8,000 local people contact me either by letter or by way of the petition which I delivered to the Prime Minister in July."

"The background to the current uncertainty lies in the Government's commitment to privatise the Post Office - although this did not appear in the Conservative's 1992 General Election manifesto. About a year ago the Minister responsible for the Post Office - Edward Leigh, the MP for Gainsborough and Horncastle - was sacked from the Government but we know from his recent statements that before his departure from office he delivered a report to Number 10 on Post Office privatisation. At the end of the year, he publicly accused the Prime Minister of suppressing the report - describing John Major's dithering as "political funk". And now, the Chairman of the Post Office has publicly accused the Government of drift and uncertainty saying that the absence of a decision - one way or the other - on Post Office privatisation is causing great damage to the organisation."

More follows

Post Office dithering

"The Government should immediately declare its intentions one way or the other" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: Last year, a major campaign was organised concerning the future of the sub post office network. Local Postmasters and Postmistresses feared for their businesses and livelihoods if the Government decided to move over to "automated credit transfer" for pensions and other benefits. Under this set-up, pensions and other payments would be made directly into the person's bank account and no transactions would take place over the Post Office counter. There was a furious reaction to this proposal and the Government has, so far, backed off. They say no-one will be obliged to accept payment by this method unless he or she specifically agrees to it.

Crown Post Offices are closing at an alarming rate. Over the UK as a whole, the number of Crown Post Offices has plummeted from 1,499 in 1987/8 to 881 by November 1993. In Lancashire over the same period we have gone from 23 to 14. And here in Pendle we are down from three to one - in Nelson - and now even that is under threat. The number of Crown Post Offices has shrunk by over 40% since 1987/8.

Post Offices are not allowed to compete with the private sector on even terms as they are not permitted to act as agents for commercial organisations and sell other services such as insurance. The Post Office has been pressing the Government to allow it the freedom to do this but has come up against a brick wall. Many suspect it is a calculated policy to weaken the Post Office, making it easier to break up and privatise.

By July 1993, one person in eight of Pendle's adult population of 65,000 had written to local MP or signed the petitions protesting about the Government's threat to local post offices. The petition, containing over 8,000 names, was handed in to 10 Downing Street that same month.

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Number 03/94

MP FEARS DELAY IN STOCKS BECK CLEAN UP

Leaked documents showing the Government is preparing to abandon plans to clean up the nation's 26,000 miles of waterway have prompted fears that the polluted Stocks Beck could be an early casualty. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, revealed last October that the watercourse could have to wait until 2005 before being cleaned up.

The latest disclosures, published in today's Observer, suggest the Government is planning to delay or scrap entirely much needed environmental work to improve the water quality of Britain's rivers and streams.

The Observer report (Whitehall slashes 100 schemes to clean up polluted waterways) claims a list of 131 priority clean up schemes for sewage works in England and Wales, drawn up by the National Rivers Authority, has been rejected by the Department of the Environment as too expensive. The newspaper alleges *"The NRA was forced to slash the list of schemes - the cost of which will be borne by the water companies - to 29. The confidential list will be considered by Environment Secretary, John Gummer this month."*

"This leak is disturbing news indeed. I want action on Stocks Beck and I want it now and I am not prepared to be fobbed off by Government Ministers. I intend to raise the matter in Parliament this week" said Prentice.

Last month, the MP inspected Stocks Beck and the Barnoldswick Sewage Works with Dr Chris Harpley, the North West Regional chief of the National Rivers Authority, and other senior staff responsible for water quality. At the time, the MP said it was "plainly unacceptable" for an eleven year delay in the clean up.

Note to Editors: The MP disclosed last month that a decision by the Government to declare Stocks Beck environmentally sensitive could accelerate the clean up and get it completed by 1998. At the time he said this was still too many years away "but at least it is this side of the millenium."

Following the on-site inspection Prentice observed: "Stocks Beck is absorbing too many nitrates from agricultural use and this promotes the growth of algae. There are also problems with dyes getting into the water course turning it an unnatural shade. But, at the bottom of it all, is the Barnoldswick Sewage Works. They do an excellent job there but the works were really built in the wrong place. Stocks Beck is simply too small a stream to take the volume of treated effluent coming from the Sewage Works."

For Immediate Release: 12 January 1994
Number 04/94

GOVERNMENT GRANTS TO PENDLE "INDEFENSIBLE" says PRENTICE

The new system of allocating Government cash to councils has been described as "absolutely indefensible" by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who today joined an all Party deputation of Pendle councillors - led by Council Leader, Susan Nike - to lobby the Government for help.

The deputation, supported by Council Chief Executive Stephen Barnes, told Environment Minister Tony Baldry MP that changes to the way in which the area's social and economic needs are assessed by the Government - and grants are allocated - had put Pendle over a barrel financially.

The Government's new formulae had pushed Pendle down from 70th in the current year's list of councils ranked by deprivation and need to 154th in the new financial year starting in April. At the same time, councillors told Mr Baldry an independent study from the University of Bristol showed Pendle 54th in the scale out of 366 authorities in terms of material deprivation. The crude effect of this is to lose the council £1m of resources in the space of a single year. And in spite of a standstill budget, changes to the "transitional relief" brought in to cushion the impact of the move from Poll Tax to the Council Tax would mean Pendle receiving £300,000 in 1994/5 compared with £1m in the current year. Without a re-think this will feed through to the Council Tax this year with big percentage increases.

After the meeting, Prentice commented: "The message from everyone present was "Give us a break!". Pendle has somersaulted backwards through hoops to balance its Budget and keep things on an even keel and then along comes the Government and changes the rules with this appalling effect. The Council made a powerful case to the Minister. I hope he will respond positively."

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1994
Number 05/94

MP RENEWS CALL FOR GREATER MINIBUS SAFETY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for better safety regulations for coaches and minibuses.

Last October, the Pendle MP called on Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, to ensure all school transport was fitted with seat belts. Weeks after this, a tragic motorway accident claimed the lives of twelve children from Hagley RC High School.

Prentice said: "We need to put an end to avoidable deaths and injuries caused by coach and minibus accidents. Parents in Pendle must be able to feel sure that their children are travelling in well laid out and properly maintained minibuses with seatbelts, driven by drivers who have been trained and tested. Pensioners and people with disabilities need equal protection.

"Labour is urging the Government to hold talks with all interested organisations and thrash out new regulations to protect everybody who travels in a coach or minibus. And I shall be contacting local organisations asking them to support Labour's Safety in Transit campaign.

Those supporting Labour's campaign for safer coach and mini bus travel include the British Roads Federation, Bus and Coach Council, Community Transport Association, National Union of Teachers. RAC and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

Note to Editors:

(1) The key points of Labour's Safety in transit campaign:

• Installing and wearing of seat belts in coaches and minibuses to be compulsory. New and tougher regulation of internal design and seat layout to be thrashed out with operators of coaches and minibuses.

• Training and testing of coach and minibus drivers to be made compulsory. Local registers of licensed drivers to be collated and available for public inspection. Specific licensing system to be determined after talks with the voluntary and educational sectors.

• End of the 'three for two' rule for children in large seats.

• Compulsory fitting of fuel tank cut-off devices and electrical system cut-off devices in all new coaches and minibuses.

• Voluntary operated minibuses to be required to take full Public Service Vehicle MOT tests.

• Discussions to be held with insurance industry to provide incentives for upgrading of existing buses, coaches and minibuses.

• Discussions to be held with motoring organisations, consumer groups and motorway users before introducing improvements in service area provision, rest/picnic areas, motorway lighting and information systems and roadworks.

(2) Background information: Recent accidents on British motorways have highlighted the need for increased coach and minibus safety. Their design, layout and maintenance, together with driver training and testing, are inadequately regulated. Yet their passengers are likely to include the most vulnerable social groups, including children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT: The present regulations controlling the design and layout of minibuses are inadequate. Well designed minibuses have good seating complete with three-point seatbelts, easy access to and from seats and doors, well upholstered interiors and all subject to regular inspection and maintenance. In contrast, some other minibuses have a 'crew bus' layout with bench seats parallel to the sides, no seat belts, a bare metal interior and no adequate inspection. The worst must be brought up to the standard of the best. This can only be done by Government regulation.

SEATBELTS: At present, it is compulsory to install and wear seat belts in the front seats of minibuses and coaches, but not elsewhere in the vehicle. A major cause of injuries and deaths comes from passengers being thrown out of their seats, on to the seat in front, or out of the vehicle altogether. In one incident, a child was killed when she was thrown out of the back of a minibus, across the central reservation and into the path of oncoming traffic. At present, three children under 14 years of age are allowed to share two seats. This unsafe practice must be stopped.

Most safety experts agree that compulsory wearing of seatbelts to restrain the passenger in the seat will lead to fewer deaths and less serious injuries. The Government has not succeeded in getting EC agreement to the compulsory installation and wearing of seatbelts on coaches and minibuses. They need to try harder.

DRIVER TRAINING AND LICENSING: At present, anyone over 21 years of age who holds a current driving licence can drive a minibus with up to 17 passengers.

Yet driving minibuses is a more complex, stressful and responsible task than driving the standard family car. Trials show that even basic driver assessment and training will reduce the likelihood of accidents. In one local authority area where basic driver assessment, training and regular rechecking was implemented, there was a 70 per cent reduction in repair costs over a three year period.

Proper regulation to require the training and testing of volunteer drivers would undoubtedly reduce the number of accidents. Goodwill is no substitute for safe performance.

IMPROVEMENTS IN BRITAIN'S MOTORWAYS: Another cause for concern is lack of motorway services and roadside picnic areas. In some areas at present, motorway users can travel over 150 miles without finding a single service area. With driver fatigue a common cause of accidents, more service areas would add to motorway safety.

Better motorway lighting and information systems would also help improve safety on the motorways, as would better procedures for roadworks.

SAFETY ACROSS THE NETWORK: Many more accidents take place on trunk and principal 'A' roads than on motorways. In 1992, the percentage of all road accidents which occurred on motorways was 2.8 per cent, compared with 9.2 per cent for trunk roads and 37.7 per cent for principal roads. Improvements in the existing road network should not be confined to motorways but should cover all roads.

(3) On 20 October 1993, The Roads Minister, Robert Key, told the Pendle MP *"Many thousands of children travel to school each day in coaches, buses and minibuses, which remain the safest form, of road transport in this country, considerably safer in fact than other means of transport, including private cars. The local education authority, or governing body of a school, can stipulate that all buses used should have seat belts, but in reality few do so."*

In November, the MP wrote to Education Secretary, John Patten, urging additional resources to be made available to schools to offset the cost of fitting seat belts.

For Immediate Release: 25 January 1994
Number 06/94

NOT USED

For Immediate Release: 12 January 1994

Number 07/94

PENDLE'S JOBLESS MOVES UP AGAIN

Unemployment is up again Pendle after three months in which it edged downwards. The December 93 totals, released today, show 2,772 people in Pendle out of work (7.4%) and claiming benefit compared with 2,719 for November ((7.2%). These figures are below the national and regional averages.

Of the 2,772 people, 2,196 are men and 576 women. Vacancies at the job centres in Colne and Nelson are down.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "On the Frost Programme last Sunday morning, I heard the Prime Minister explain what he really meant by the *"Back to Basics"* policy. He said it was designed to meet the fears of ordinary people about unemployment, rising crime, educational standards and so on. The man has no sense of irony whatsoever.

"The Prime Minister and the former Chancellor, Norman Lamont, told us, in the celebrated phrase, "unemployment was a price well worth paying..." and now we are advised that the *Back to Basics* policy is about meeting people's fears about unemployment!"

"I won't even begin to be satisfied until John Major gets unemployment in Pendle down to the level he inherited from his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher. In November 1990, the figure stood at 1,708.

Note to Editors: For trend figures see attached Pendle Job Watch (10/94)

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1994
Number 08/94

PRENTICE PRESSES FOR ACTION ON UNDER FIVES EDUCATION

The Government should talk less and act more on the needs of the under fives according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, following a meeting today with Local Government Minister, David Curry.

The local MP and other Labour Parliamentary colleagues joined an all-Party deputation from Lancashire County Council led by Council Leader, Louise Ellman. The team of councillors and officials arrived at Westminster determined to press the case for additional Government resources lost from Lancashire and channelled into southern counties such as Kent, Essex and Hampshire.

Prentice told the Local Government Minister that Lancashire had a cast iron case for more money to help the under fives - especially in the light of the Prime Minister's public utterances on the desirability of more nursery education.

The MP said: "The County Council calculates it should receive an extra £4.9 million for its Under Fives. (The reference here is to the Under Fives SSA or

Standard Spending Assessment. A council's SSA is the amount of money the Government thinks it ought to spend on a particular service to achieve parity of provision - or a standard level of service - across the country. The importance of the SSA is that it determines the level of central government grant).

"At the moment, the Government does its sums on the basis of the under five population county by county - rather than by actual under five pupil numbers. The County Council has been putting a lot of emphasis on the under fives and is being unfairly penalised for doing what the Government apparently wants to encourage. Mr Curry told us what we already knew - that under fives provision was non statutory. He said councils were open to do as much or as little as they liked which was why the formula used
under fives population as the benchmark rather than the numbers actually in nursery education."

"His argument is absolutely specious. We've had the Prime Minister going on and on about his commitment to nursery education yet the Government shies away from backing councils like Lancashire who are trying to do something about it. And the business about non statutory services is quite disingenuous. The Education SSA recognises, and therefore finances, post 16 education provision - which is also non statutory."

"If the Government is serious about nursery education it should make it a statutory requirement. Simple as that."

"There is a related, important issue that needs to be addressed. And that is about who gets nursery education in the first place. Government policy is to restrict public provision to children in need because of "health or social difficulties" not to all under fives. The County Council, quite properly, steers resources into those areas that are most deprived but why should children elsewhere lose out on nursery education? The answer must be to make provision universal."

Note to Editors:

(1) Lancashire County Council's Under Fives SSA is £25.772m - 2.76% of the national total. But, based on numbers on school registers at January 1992, the authority had 3.28% of the national total of pupil numbers. The council told the Minister this position had arisen as a result of their policy over a number of years of expanding provision for education for the under fives. The proportion of the national total of pupil numbers in January for each of the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 was 3.5%, 3.4% and 3.36% respectively... The SSA distribution is clearly failing to support the actual level of provision for the under fives in Lancashire.

The primary, secondary and post 16 sub blocks of the Education SSA use pupil numbers to assess the need to spend - not population numbers. The Council contends the under fives SSA should be assessed in the same way.

(2) A detailed explanation of Labour's policy for the Under Fives is set out in Press Release 186/93 (16 November 1993)

For Immediate Release: 11 January 1994
Number 09/94

LIB DEM WHITEWASH ON RACIST LEAFLETS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has spoken out against the decision of a committee of the Liberal Democrat's London Regional Executive not to expel two of their councillors in Tower Hamlets who were involved in the "racist leaflets" controversy.

Prentice commented: "We were told that Paddy Ashdown wanted "decisive action" on these scurrilous Liberal Democrat election leaflets. It is as plain as a pikestaff the leaflets pandered to racism yet it appears that nothing is going to happen to the people responsible."

"Even some prominent Liberal Democrats choked on the sight of these leaflets which go way beyond the kind of grotesque parodies of the truth that we are used to seeing on their so called *Focus* leaflets. The Lib Dem MP for Bermondsey, Simon Hughes, has courageously spoken out on the issue - but before the recent inquiry decision. He said *"senior Party members could not, and would not, continue in the Party if it produced a whitewash. In my view these leaflets are racist and unacceptable."*

Prentice continued: "I was disappointed to see our local Liberal Democrat councillor, Tony Greaves, accuse those members of his Party who were advocating some form of disciplinary action "of indulging in *political correctness."* (see The Guardian 17 Nov 93)

"It is for the Liberal Democrats to set their own house in order - but members of all political parties and none have a legitimate interest in the outcome of this whole sordid business."

PENDLE JOB WATCH: Jobless totals since John Major became PM
from Gordon Prentice MP

Unemployed	Date	Rate
1708	Nov-90	4.5
2037	Dec-90	5.3
2199	Jan-91	5.7
2286	Feb-91	5.9
2467	Mar-91	6.4
2494	Apr-91	6.5
2548	May-91	6.6
2608	Jun-91	6.8
2752	Jul-91	7.1
2815	Aug-91	7.3
2762	Sep-91	7.2
2651	Oct-91	6.9
2610	Nov-91	6.8
2684	Dec-91	7
3001	Jan-92	7.8
2958	Feb-92	7.7
2948	Mar-92	7.6
3020	Apr-92	7.8
3064	May-92	7.9

3015	Jun-92		7.8			
3274	Jul-92		8.5			
3355	Aug-92		8.7			
3216	Sep-92		8.3	Colne	Vacancies	Nelson
2950	Oct-92		7.6	114	Oct-92	368
2822	Nov-92		7.3	110	Nov-92	236
3006	Dec-92		7.8	102	Dec-92	166
3161	Jan-93		8.2	49	Jan-93	160
3031	Feb-93		7.9	91	Feb-93	150
3025	Mar-93		7.8	93	Mar-93	128
2972	Apr-93			87	Apr-93	158
		*7.9				
2861	May-93		7.6	110	May-93	160
2928	Jun-93		7.8	113	Jun-93	176
3234	Jul-93		8.6	99	Jul-93	142
3237	Aug-93		8.6	121	Aug-93	155
3065	Sep-93		8.1	99	Sep-93	196
2783	Oct-93		7.4	124	Oct-93	349
2719	Nov-93		7.2	105	Nov-93	261
2772	Dec-93		7.4	96	Dec-93	153

*change in method of calculating working population

For Immediate Release: 13 January 1994
Number 11/94

MP BACKS MOVES TO SAVE PENDLE FIRE COVER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is again backing moves to prevent cuts in Pendle's fire cover. The engine in Colne is again threatened by the cash strapped County Council. Last year, the axe hung over two fire engines - one in Colne and the other at Barnoldswick - but both were reprieved.

The MP is meeting local fire-fighters tomorrow evening (Friday 14th) and has already pressed Lancashire County Council to look again at proposed fire cuts which are to be considered next week.

Prentice said: "We cannot have this constant examination and re-examination of our fire cover every year. I looked at the whole position in detail twelve months ago when there were similar concerns expressed about the number of fire engines in Pendle. I cannot believe the situation has changed so dramatically that a reduction in fire cover is now on the cards."

"We can't afford to take risks with this vital emergency service" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: In January of last year, fire-fighters from Colne Fire Station told the County Council's Fire and Public Protection Committee that Colne was one of the busiest 2 pump retained stations in the county with over 350 calls in 1992. The Fire Station at Colne is in the centre of Pendle which allows the 2 pumps to provide cover and back-up to the two key stations at Burnley and Nelson, plus Barnoldswick and Earby. They also provide the second pump to all pumps at Cowling.

For Immediate Release: 17 January 1994
Number 12/94

MP UNVEILS TORY "TAX DIARY"

Direct taxes are now higher than they were when Labour left office in 1979 according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Increases in national insurance tax, reductions in the value of tax allowances and cuts in mortgage tax relief mean the direct tax burden on a typical family will rise to 21.9% in 1994/5 - a full one per cent higher than when the Conservatives came to power.

Indirect taxes have also soared. Since 1979 the rate of VAT has gone up from 8% to 17.5% and VAT has been charged on more and more bills. There have been 14 extensions of the scope of the tax.

Prentice commented: "People here in Pendle - like everyone else nationwide - are waiting for the Tory tax bombshell to explode over their heads. The Government is responsible for the biggest tax hike in British history - with hidden tax increases equivalent to 7p on income tax. As a result of the tax increases already announced by the Government, a typical family will now have to pay an extra £1,330 in taxes over the next two years. Prentice continued: "Before the last election the Tories produced bogus claims about Labour's tax plans. Yet the very people they promised to protect in their election advertising are being hit by Tory tax rises. In his constituency election address in 1992, the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, said '*Only the Conservatives believe in keeping taxation down top give incentives to enterprise and investment'.* Now, he is the biggest tax raiser in living memory. The Government's record on taxation is simply grotesque."

Note to Editors: The Conservative advertising campaign featured a teacher, a clinical nurse, a computer operator and an electrician. This is what they will have to pay:

- A teacher scale 1 rate A on £12,480 per year will now pay £785 extra tax under the Tories when the Tories claimed that under Labour the bill would be £405

- A clinical nurse on £13,250 will pay an extra £791 when the Tories claimed that under Labour the bill would be £479

- A computer operator on £15,000 will pay an extra £811 when the Tories claimed that under Labour the bill would be £647

- An electrician on £13,500 will pay an extra £794 when the Tories claimed that under labour the bill would be £503

Under Labour's actual tax plans at the last election each of these wage earners would have received a tax cut and would have been £82.15p a year better off.

The Tory Tax Diary. This is what it looks like:

January 94	Excise duty on alcohol: table wine up 2p a bottle, sparkling wine up 4p a bottle, cider up 1p per two litre bottle
April	First pay cheque - Personal Allowances frozen at 1992/3 levels Married Couples Allowance frozen at 92/3 levels National Insurance tax - 1p increase
May	Mortgage due - Tax relief limited to 20%
June	2nd quarter Gas and Electricity bills - fuel tax at 8%
October	Premium tax on car insurance - payment up 3% Premium tax on home contents insurance - up by 3%
November	Excise duty on tobacco will be increased by at least 3% in real terms Duty on road fuels will be raised on average by at least 5% in real terms
December	Christmas holiday makers pay Air Passenger tax - £5 for European Flights and £10 elsewhere
April 95	Married Couples Allowance reduced to 15%
May	Mortgage due - Tax relief limited to 15%
June	2nd quarter Gas and Electricity bills - Fuel Tax at 17.5%
November	Excise Duty on tobacco increased by at least 3% in real terms Duty on Road Fuels will be raised on average by at least 5% in real terms

For Immediate Release: 17 January 1994
Number 13/94

NO PRIORITY TREATMENT FOR LEAKIEST WATER MAIN IN COUNTY

The water main in Foulridge - dubbed the leakiest mains in Lancashire by local MP, Gordon Prentice - will not be a priority for replacement says North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher. He told the MP the company was *"reluctant to bring forward our programme for the duplication of the existing main at this stage"*. The MP said the statement would come as a big disappointment to everyone in the village.

Prentice said: "I told Sir Desmond last month that the water main bursts at the drop of a hat. It burst twice in 1988, once in 1991, once in 1992 and no fewer than three times in 1993. Now I am told the frequency of bursts only now

justifies a replacement. Incredibly, other schemes *"with a higher rate of interruption"* are still awaiting firm dates for work to begin on them."

"This is cold comfort indeed. Sir Desmond tells me that other mains bursts in the village have interrupted the water supply for a small number of customers but these incidents had *"confused the situation and given the impression that the main along Skipton New Road has burst more often."* What an incredible performance!"

North West Water told the MP it was trying to improve the reliability of the existing supply by either reducing water pressure in the area or reducing the size of the main which would allow the company *"to slip-line the pipework along part of Skipton Road".*

"Sir Desmond has undertaken to get back to me within the next two weeks to let me know the results of his investigations."

For Immediate Release: 17 January 1994
Number 14/94

PRENTICE ATTACKS AGRICULTURE SPENDING CUTS

Cuts in agricultural spending were condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who was speaking last Friday to the National Farmers Union, Nelson and Colne Branch. He said the cuts in the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HCLA) - announced just over a month ago - would cause long term damage to employment in the countryside and to the rural environment.

He told the Pendle farmers: "HCLA is paid to some of the poorest farmers in the country to compensate them for the permanent hardships they face in some of the most remote parts of the country. In 1992, the Government cut HLCAs for the first time ever and the further cut announced at the end of November threatens the long term future of hill farming. Other rural economic activities such as tourism depend on hill farming. The allowance for a hardy breed ewe drops 75p to £5.75. The MP told the meeting he was backing moves in the Commons to force a Government re-think."

The MP also tackled thorny topical issues such as the Milk Marque - the planned successor to the Milk Marketing Board and the threat to animal health from imported disease such as Foot and Mouth and Equine Viral Arteritis.

Prentice said: "It was a good meeting which touched on lots of important agricultural issues - from slaughterhouse regimes, GATT and subsidy arrangements to more local matters such as water run-off into streams and watercourses. Like most people who have to earn their living, small farmers have had a pretty raw deal from the Government over recent years."

For Immediate Release: 16 January 1994
Number 15/94

MP BACKS MOVES TO EQUALISE AGE OF CONSENT

The age of consent should be equalised at sixteen says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He plans to vote for an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill which aims to legalise sexual relations between consenting males over the age of 16.

The MP said: "At present, it is lawful for a young man of sixteen to have sex with someone of the opposite sex of the same age or older. He can marry, join the army and pay taxes. But if he wants to have a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex he must wait until he is 21 for this to be lawful. Paradoxically, it is lawful for a young woman of 16 or over to have a sexual relationship with another woman."

"In this day and age there is no conceiveable justification for this unequal treatment. The sexual orientation of people is a matter for them and no-one else. The law should not intervene in decisions taken by freely consenting adults - and in this context I mean people of 16 and over."

"Health professionals - from the BMA down - want to see the law changed. This would decriminalise the young people involved - and help stop the spread of HIV and AIDS."

For Immediate Release: 16 January 1994
16/94

MP SLAMS "NAUSEATING DOUBLE STANDARDS"

Revelations last week that Westminster Council has been operating a housing policy specifically designed to change the political balance in "target wards" in favour of the Conservatives was roundly condemned by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, in the Commons last week.

Details of the scheme - set out in a preliminary report of the independent auditor who had been called in over four years ago by concerned residents - showed the council leader, Dame Shirley Porter conspiring with other leading Conservatives in the Government's flagship local authority - to alter the social composition of key wards, vital to future Conservative control. The plan involved keeping council houses and flats empty - despite soaring homelessness - until they could be sold on the open market. The homeless were put into Bed and Breakfast accommodation which cost the council millions. Dame Shirley and the others - including former Westminster councillor and now Tory MP, Barry Legg - could be required to pay back to the council up to £21m, the cost of the scam.

In an angry exchange on the floor of the Commons, the Pendle MP clashed with Environment Secretary, John Gummer, accusing the Conservatives of "nauseating double standards". He said: "The Minister is inviting the House not to rush to judgement yet as far as Westminster Council is concerned the Conservatives never make any judgements at all! There was a deafening silence at the time of the 15p cemetery deal and nothing was heard from the Government when Dame Shirley Porter was sacking senior officers right, left and centre. What will people think of these nauseating double standards? We are invited not to pass judgement where the Conservative flagship of Westminster is concerned but these very same Conservatives rush to judgement at the merest tittle tattle about any Labour local authority."

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1994
17/94

FURY OVER GAS SHOWROOM CLOSURE

The decision of British Gas to close their showroom in Barnoldswick has prompted an angry reaction from Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice In a letter to the company's General Manager, the MP says it is yet another blow for the town which has invested so much time, effort and money in making the town centre an attractive place to shop and work.

The MP said: "British Gas is more interested in generating vast profits than in providing a service to local people. Not so long ago the showroom in Nelson closed. Now it's the turn of Barnoldswick. Where on earth is it going to end? The company reports its profits for the calendar year and the latest set available relates to the year ending December 1992. These show British Gas made a current cost operating profit of £1,429 and a current cost profit after taxation of £475m. And then I am told the Barnoldswick showroom has to close because it is not pulling its weight and contributing enough to the success of the company."

"British Gas has got some explaining to do" fumed the MP.

Note to Editors: The MP's letter reads: *"I appreciate that trading conditions may not be at their best in these recessionary times, but things are not always going to be so bad. British Gas should look at the medium term, when demand will pick up and people will be more willing to spend money again... You say in your letter that the town will be provided with alternative facilities but I am at a loss to know what you mean by this. Perhaps you could let me know what you have in mind. I would also appreciate details of how many showroom closures there have been for each of the past five years and also the trend in the sales of appliances over the same period. I am also interested in knowing how many showrooms you will still maintain elsewhere in towns of a comparable size to Barnoldswick (which has a population of just over 12,000)..."*

Profit for the year ending December 1992 expressed in historic cost terms show an operating profit of £1,678 and a profit after tax of £683m. Historic cost and current cost are accounting conventions relating to how assets are valued (and therefore how depreciation is calculated). British Gas accounts show both.

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1994
18/94

MP TO PRESS GOVERNMENT FOR EARLY START TO WORK ON WEST COAST MAIN LINE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, wants to see an early start to vital upgrading work on British Rail's West Coast Main Line. And he plans to tackle Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, at a meeting next month on the thorny issue.

In a separate move the MP has told the Lancashire Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England that he will be pressing for the entire route to be modernised - whatever the source of funding. The CPRE told the MP that the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, had promised the upgrading of the line but this was later qualified by the Government, saying it would be seeking private sector funding and would be modernising only from Euston to Crewe.

Prentice said: "The story of the West Coast Main Line is a hoary old chestnut indeed. It has been in and out of the fire countless times. I shall be pressing Mr MacGregor for an absolute commitment - insofar as such a thing is possible from this Government - that work will go ahead even if private financing is not forthcoming. Modernising the nation's transport infrastructure should not be made dependent on the availability of private finance. We've seen where that gets us."

Note to Editors: The Lancashire Branch of the CPRE told the MP: *"The sum to be spent on adding an extra lane to sections of the M62 - an estimated £540m - would pay for modernising the whole of the line from London to Glasgow. Indeed, proposed spending on major new roads of some £23 billion contrasts sharply with BR's total allocation of £1 billion for 1994. In our small overcrowded island, it would surely make more sense to favour rail expenditure.... The West Coast Main Line is a vital component in this region's development."*

For Immediate Release: 18 January 1994
19/94

MP PREDICTS SNUB FOR MINISTER

The final report of the Local Government Commission on the future of the North Yorkshire County Council and its district councils is to be published next week and Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, predicts it will snub the views of his next door neighbour, David Curry, the MP for Skipton and Ripon. Mr Curry is the Local Government Minister in charge of steering the reforms through the House of Commons.

The Commission - the body charged by Parliament to make proposals to the Government on redrawing the local government map of England - has been buffeted by blasts of criticism over its handling of the review. The Pendle MP said: "It has recommended two tiers of councils in some places; a single tier in others and a confusing hotch potch of authorities of very different sizes."

"I don't know what is going to emerge from the North Yorkshire review but if it proposes a link up between Craven and Lancashire's Ribble Valley I shall eat my hat. This was the completely off-the-wall proposal made a few months ago by the Local Government Minister himself - in a breach of all established protocol. I wrote to the Prime Minister about Mr Curry's public remarks and, predictably, got a limp reply. I have also written to the Chairman of the Commission, Sir John Banham, asking for his views on the propriety of the Minister's intervention and I await a reply. There are conventions that have to be scrupulously observed and I intend to see they are."

"People simply do not want gigantic local authorities. If, as I suspect, there is a drastic reduction in councils in North Yorkshire coupled with the abolition of the county council, people there will rightly be outraged" said Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 24 January 1994
20/94

"CURRY IN A PICKLE" AS COUNCIL REVIEW AXES NORTH YORKSHIRE

Local Government Minister David Curry has been given a slap in the face by the Local Government Commission whose review of North Yorkshire is published today. The Skipton and Ripon MP provoked an outcry last November when he publicly urged people in the Craven District of North Yorkshire to lobby the Commission for a link up with Ribble Valley across the border in Lancashire.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency lies alongside Mr Curry's ridiculed the final proposals which will put Craven into a new unitary "West Riding" stretching through Harrogate and down past Selby into Boothferry in North Lincolnshire. A little over two months ago Mr Curry described the merger of Craven and Harrogate *"a dead duck"*. The Pendle MP commented: "The duck is alive and quacking and even larger than before!"

Prentice said: "North Yorkshire County Council is to disappear in a puff of blue smoke and Craven Council is set to become part of this giant new authority stretching down to Lincolnshire! Does he agree with the Craven Herald newspaper when it said last week that the Government couldn't be *that stupid* to agree a unitary authority on these bloated boundaries. If this goes through the word *'local'* in local government will cease to mean anything. People in Craven have every reason to feel absolutely outraged."

"The Commission's decision to reject the Local Government Minister's preferred solution - which was for a ludicrous and hasty shotgun marriage between Craven and Ribble Valley - puts him in a real pickle. Is he going to throw the report in the dustbin? Is he now going to change his mind and welcome it? I intend to raise the matter in the Commons."

"The Commission has humiliated the Minister for Local Government whose views have not even deserved a footnote."

Note to Editors: The Commission's final report now goes to the Secretary of State for the Environment who will give the Government's response. Whatever then emerges goes to Parliament for approval. The Commission recommends reforming the two tier system of two county and 17 district councils with seven unitary authorities in North Yorkshire and Humberside. The present two tier system in Lincolnshire is retained.

The Commission's report to the Secretary of State *"recognises that Craven, alone among North Yorkshire Districts, has a majority wishing to keep the present arrangements. However, people in the area identified more strongly with Yorkshire and the Ridings than with the district council area and there was inadequate support for it to become a unitary authority - which in any event at 50,000 population would be very small."*

Mr Curry told the Craven Herald in November that the Local Government Commission's proposed merger of Craven and Harrogate was *"a dead duck"*. He said York was *"virtually certain to get its own all purpose council and Harrogate is big enough at least to be able to put up a good case to manage its own affairs".* He then proposed the merger of Craven Council in Yorkshire and Ribble Valley in Lancashire saying their respective County identities would not suffer.

For Immediate Release: 24 January 1994
21/94

END "MEDIEVAL PRACTICES" says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today called on the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to abandon the "medieval practices" which transfer to the Duchy the estates of those who die without making a will in the County Palatine (the old Lancashire boundary). The MP told William Waldegrave in the Commons today that apart from Lancashire and Cornwall (where estates go to the Duchy of Cornwall) the assets of those who die intestate go to the Exchequer.

Prentice said: "There is a clear and compelling case for getting rid of this anomalous throwback to the Middle Ages. In 1991, £938,597 was scooped up by the Duchy from people who had died in the County without leaving a will and, after deductions for expenses and the like, £531,715 was available for distribution to worthy causes in the County."

"I paid a generous tribute in the House today to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for intervening at my request to reverse a decision of the Duchy's Benevolent Fund not to grant aid the Lancashire Free Legal Advice Centre who needed the money to buy updates for their law library. It was only after I left the Chamber that I found out that Mr Waldegrave chairs the Committee that dishes out or withholds the cash in the first place!"

"I see that the Committee includes people such as Major Sir Shane Blewitt KCVO, Sir Michael Bunbury and Sir Robert Morritt. Worthy and honourable men, I am sure, but how did they get there? Who appoints them? What special qualities to they bring to the job? What qualifies them to dispense hundred of thousands of pounds of other people's money to worthy causes?"

Note to Editors: The history of the Duchy of Lancaster goes back to the 13th century. Since 1399 this estate passed to each reigning monarch with the Duchy revenues providing a source of income separate from other Crown inheritances. This separate identity was preserved when in 1760 George III surrendered the revenue from the Crown Estates to the Government in exchange for the Civil List but retained the Duchy of Lancaster revenues. Contact: Gordon Prentice MP 071 219 4011

mbargoed: 25 January 1994
22/94

PENDLE MP TURNS THE HEAT UP ON CURRY

Local Government Minister, David Curry, has been told by Labour MP Gordon Prentice not to get involved in any way in formulating the Government's response to the Local Government Commission's final report on North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire nor in the forthcoming review of Lancashire.

Prentice whose constituency lies alongside the Minister's Skipton and Ripon has tabled a Commons motion today which claims Mr Curry should disqualify himself from considering these reports on the grounds he had already made up his mind.

Prentice said: "It is simply not on for the Minister with direct responsibility for the local government review to rush into the public print urging people to support his own preferred solution, while dismissively ruling out alternatives. It is not enough for him to say (as he has done) that he will not be involved in decisions affecting local authorities in his own constituency. His comments have tainted the entire review of North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire and prejudiced the one on Lancashire which is now getting under way."

Note to Editors: The MP's Early Day Motion reads:

> "This House notes that the Minister for Local Government publicly advocated the merger of Craven and Ribble Valley councils at a time when the Local Government Commission was in the process of reviewing North Yorkshire; that he publicly described a possible merger of Craven and Harrogate as "a dead duck" and, on the grounds he is prejudiced and has already formed a view, believes he should take no part in the Government's consideration of the Local Government Commission's final report on North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire published on 24 January 1994 nor in the final report on Lancashire which will be submitted in due course."

For Immediate Release: 27 January 1994
23/94

PRENTICE SLAMS HOUSING MINISTER OVER MP's COUNCIL HOUSE PURCHASE

The sale of a £300,000 council house in Westminster to Conservative MP for Rutland and Melton, Alan Duncan, has the tacit approval of Housing Minister, Sir George Young, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP provoked a furious reaction from the Government benches in last night's debate on housing when he invited the Housing Minister to condemn the millionaire MP's purchase of the council house in Gayfere Street, 400 yards from the House of Commons.

Prentice said afterwards: "The council house sales policy was never designed for this. It is a scandalous abuse of the system for this millionaire MP to accept a £50,000 discount from Westminster Council and buy his 78 year old neighbour's house, giving this elderly man an assurance that he could live there for the rest of his days. Mr Duncan said this was a long term investment. I find it quite unbelievable that something so blatant and so manipulative is not condemned unreservedly by the Housing Minister. He reserves his

disapproval - as he did at last year's Conservative Party Conference - for young single women who, apparently, get pregnant to jump the housing queue. This claim has been shown to be wholly fictitious whereas Mr Duncan's council house purchase is established fact."

The MP went on to urge the Government to make more help available to local authorities in North East Lancashire where, he said, much of the housing stock was decrepit, "falling to bits and collapsing around people's ears".

For Immediate Release: 25 January 1994
24/94

TORY THREAT TO AIRPORT SECURITY

The Government is threatening airport security by weakening existing regulations and failing to implement improvements promised after the Lockerbie disaster according to local MP Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP said: "As part of its deregulation drive, the Government is planning to reduce airport security and passenger safety. Their Transport Deregulation Task Force told them airport security was too 'belt and braces' at high cost to the industry. So the Government is set to reduce security.

"That may be why they haven't kept the promise they made after the Lockerbie disaster to strengthen the regulations to stop baggage getting on to a 'plane unless it can be matched to a passenger. Today, five years after Lockerbie, they still haven't tightened up the rules.

"As a result of all this, no fewer than 5,839,000 people flying from Manchester Airport in the last year were still at risk of unaccompanied baggage being smuggled on to their plane. 349,500 flying from Leeds/Bradford were in the same boat - so to speak.

"We in the Labour Party are calling on the Government to keep this promise at least. They must also abandon their plans to water down airport security. People's lives are more important than profits".

Embargoed: 28 January 1994
25/94

GIVE THE BIRDS A BREAK says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing East Lancashire's Ornithologists who are pressing the National Rivers Authority to abandon proposals to move the coarse fishing close season from 15 March - 15 June forward to January/February.

The MP has tabled a motion in the House of Commons urging the National Rivers Authority to think again at its meeting next month when the proposal is to come up.

Prentice said: "The present coarse fishing closed season is also the breeding season for resident and migratory birds and they need a bit of peace and quite

during these months. Any change would undoubtedly cause some disturbance and that's the last thing the birds need at that time of year."

"It's time we gave the birds a break" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 27 January 1994
26/94

MP GETS ENVIRONMENT JOB

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been elected to chair the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee for 1994/5. The Committee has a sweeping remit which shadows all the matters dealt with by the Department of the Environment - including local government, housing and planning.

The MP said: "I am delighted to be elected by my Parliamentary colleagues to chair this important committee - especially at a time when so much is happening in this area of policy."

"The first thing we need to get to grips with is the Conservative's appalling review of local government. The Local Government Commission is coming out with unadulterated rubbish after being fed a mish mash of conflicting guidelines by the Government."

"From the word go, the council review was a recipe for disaster."

Embargo: 1 February 1994
27/94

MP SALUTES COURAGE AND SACRIFICE OF MURDERED EARBY MAN

The House of Commons paid tribute today to Paul Goodall, the UN Humanitarian Aid Worker from Earby, who was brutally slain in Bosnia last Friday. The motion on the Commons Order Paper, tabled by local MP, Gordon Prentice, offered MPs' condolences to the murdered man's widow, Denise, and their four young children.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice said: "The news last Friday of Mr Goodall's murder hit us all with the force of a sledge-hammer. Here was a man with no axe to grind. He was simply engaged in the vital task of getting aid through to beleaguered and starving communities. His reward was to be brutally killed by a gang of psychopathic bandits."

"Words cannot express the horror we all feel nor can they comfort his widow, Denise, and their four young daughters."

"Mr Goodall's life will not have been sacrificed in vain if we act purposefully to bring this grizzly conflict to an end. The genocide, the ethnic cleansing, the mass rape and the slaughter of innocent children has to stop - and the UN should use military force as required to make sure this happens. I have been urging the use of air power for almost a year now but all we have had from the Government is endless vacillation."

"We must ensure the objectives set out in the London Conference 18 months ago - when Britain held the Presidency of the European Community - are followed through. The integrity of national borders has got to be respected. Civilian populations must be protected in UN safe havens and the people responsible for these grotesque war crimes should be hunted down and brought to book. These unimaginable horrors are happening on our doorstep in Europe yet we appear powerless to intervene. We must act now."

Note to Editors: The MP's Early Day Motion reads: "That this House pays tribute to Mr Paul Goodall of Earby, Lancashire who was murdered in Bosnia on Friday 28 January 1994 while engaged in providing humanitarian relief for the victims of the conflict; salutes the courage of Mr Goodall and his colleagues David Court and Simon King who were wounded in the attack and sends its condolences to his widow, Denise, and their four young daughters in their tragic bereavement."

or Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
28/94

MP PLEDGES ACTION ON BARROWFORD FLOODING

A weekend walkabout in water sodden Barrowford has convinced local MP that urgent action is needed to resolve the area's susceptibility to flooding. Just before Christmas there was a flash flood which drove people from their homes and caused thousands of pounds worth of damage.

The MP commented: "This area is like the flood plain of the Mississippi. December's flash flood was a one off caused by a blocked culvert and we still need to establish who was responsible for that happening. But the more serious problem concerns the old sewerage system which is plainly inadequate. We also need proper flood protection along Pendle Water and this could involve some dredging."

"I am in touch with North West Water and the National Rivers Authority as well as the local council and I am hopeful that, between them all, there will be a lasting solution.

Prentice said: "We also need to address the insurance problems the people down there have. With so many floods over recent years their homes are becoming impossible to insure. And if they can't be insured they won't sell. It's an appalling catch 22 and we've got to do something about it."

Note to Editors: A public meeting involving NWW, the NRA, the local council and the MP (Westminster duties permitting) will be held in Barrowford on 17 February.

For Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
29/94

COUNCIL REVIEW "COMING APART AT THE SEAMS" says PENDLE MP

News that the High Court has ruled that the Government cannot insist on the abolition of county councils in all but exceptional cases has thrown the Local

Government Review into further confusion according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP commented: "The review is clearly coming apart at the seams. An increasing number of Tory MPs are publicly expressing grave reservations about the whole exercise. So far, we've heard rumblings from Richmond's William Hague, Harrogate's Robert Banks and Selby's Michael Alison. All across the country, Tory MPs have got the jitters."

"This review of local government is close to stalling under the sheer weight of hostile criticism. Who knows what lunacies may emerge from the Lancashire Review - which is just getting under way - when we see what is happening across the border in Yorkshire with the proposed creation of gigantic new authorities?"

Note to Editors: The Local Government Commission started its review of North Yorkshire on 28 September 1992. On 19 November 1993, Local Government Minister, David Curry, openly advocated a link up between Craven council in North Yorkshire and Ribble Valley in Lancashire in his column in the Craven Herald newspaper.

The Pendle MP tabled a question to the Secretary of State for the Environment asking if he would *list the occasions "when either he or Ministers in his Department have publicly advocated specific changes in the local government map of England when the Local Government Commission was in the process of reviewing that area."* The Local Government Minister (Mr Curry) replied on 28 January 1994 stating that *"it is the policy of the Secretary of State and Ministers in his Department who will be involved in decisions on changes to local government structure, not to comment on specific changes in an area which the Local Government Commission is in the process of reviewing. I am not aware of any breaches of this policy."*

The Local Government Minister is on record stating that decisions affecting *his own constituency* will not be taken by him but by other Ministers.

For Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
30/94

DON'T PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED

In an move unprecedented in the history of the local press, a Labour MP is publicly calling on one of his local newspapers not to report his views.

MP Gordon Prentice explained: "Instead of loftily pretending to be above the political fray, the Craven Herald would be better off stating publicly that it will, in future, no longer report the views of Pendle's Labour MP."

"Their record in reporting my views about anything is quite lamentable but their handling of the current controversy over local government re-organisation really takes the biscuit. It is a big local issue which is raging away like a bush fire. I have deeply held and well informed views but these are simply not being adequately reported. Indeed, I would readily debate the subject locally, in public, with the Skipton and Ripon MP, David Curry, who

doubles up as the Local Government Minister chiefly responsible for this dog's breakfast of a council review."

The MP continued: "It is not as if the paper doesn't hear from me. A few months ago, a rare editorial mentioned my name and confessed their office was bombarded with my faxed press releases. When I later drew attention to the obvious - the fact that they rarely published them - my letter went into the voluminous letters page minus the last paragraph which had been critical of the paper!"

"My 17,000 constituents in the West Craven area - that part of Pendle where the Craven Herald circulates - are entitled to know my views on the major issues of the day - even if the paper chooses not to report them. The people of West Craven deserve better than this rag."

For Immediate Release: 31 January 1994
31/94

FUTURE OF WAR PENSIONS JOBS "IN THE BALANCE" says PRENTICE

126 jobs at the War Pensions Unit in Brunswick Street, Nelson could be lost to Blackpool according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "When I first got news of this bombshell I immediately contacted Michael Bichard, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, who is responsible for the administration of war pensions."

"No final decisions have been made but I am obviously deeply concerned about the whole proposal. We can't afford to lose any more jobs from Pendle."

Note to Editors: In his letter of 25 January, Mr Bichard wrote: "With a reducing number of claims and a new computer system in 1995 the War Pensions Unit is looking at its service delivery to see how work can be better processed.

"One option is to centralise the work currently carried out at Nelson within the War Pensions main operations centre at Norcross, Blackpool. There are currently 126 staff engaged on war Pensions duties at Nelson, but as no final conclusion has been reached as to the relocation I am not in a position to comment on the precise numbers or grades of staff which may be involved in such a move, or when such a move may take place."

"Full consultation has taken place with all relevant Civil Service unions concerning the proposals."

For Immediate Release: 2 February 1994
32/94

PRESSURE EASES IN LEAKIEST MAIN IN LANCASHIRE

North West Water chiefs have told local MP, Gordon Prentice, they plan to cut the water pressure at Foulridge in the hope this will prevent the leakiest main in Lancashire from springing new leaks.

Prentice said: "This is clearly second best as what people in the village want is a brand new main that will carry water from A to B without turning into a colander. I have pressed the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, to bring forward their plans for replacing the main but he tells me there are other mains in worse condition. Like most people, I find this difficult to believe but we have it on the authority of Sir Desmond. The state of the mains system in the North West must be truly appalling."

"I have raised the whole question of compensation for the villagers and I am seeking assurances that the pressure reduction won't mean water dribbling out of taps and shower heads. That would really be the last straw."

Note to Editors: Sir Desmond told the MP that a computer model had suggested the pressure cut could work. In a letter dated 25 January. he he wrote: "I confirm we have carried out a desk top study using a computer model which has shown that we could reduce the water mains pressure by about 5 metres. We intend to prove this by pressure logging on site. It the pressure can be reduced the reliability of the main will be increased.

"With regard to slip lining the existing main, this is not an option. The cost of this work, whilst maintaining supplies to the village, would be approaching the cost ol a new main and we are reluctant to invest this capital at the present time for the reasons explained in my last letter."

We will ol course review the timing ot our capital work in Foulridge should the main fracture again, but our expectation is that we ean reduce the likelihood of this happening.

For Immediate Release: 10 February 1994
33/94

NORTHWESTMINSTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on the BBC North West regional Parliamentary programme this Sunday, 13 February.

Northwestminster is on air from 2pm - 2.30pm.

For Immediate Release: 3 February 1994
34/94

MP TACKLES YORKSHIRE ELECTRICITY CHIEFS OVER BARLICK SHOWROOM CLOSURE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, tackled Yorkshire Electricity chiefs last night on the company's showroom in Church Street, Barnoldswick, which closed nine months ago and is still empty. The decision to pull out of Barnoldswick last year provoked a furious row.

After the meeting with the company's directors at Westminster, the MP said: "Yorkshire Electricity's decision was the start of a slippery slope and we now have a problem with British Gas who want to do precisely the same thing.

These are magnet shops that draw people into the town and we cannot afford to lose them."

"The decision of the utilities to cutback on their retailing operations will have a ripple effect on all traders. I am writing to the Environment Secretary to find out what assessment the Government has made of the economic and social effects of these pull-outs on small and medium sized towns. Clearly, the planning system needs to take account of these trends."

For Immediate Release: 7 February 1994
35/94

CLAIM THAT DEPRIVATION "WORSE IN BOURNEMOUTH THAN PENDLE" IS RIDICULED BY PRENTICE

Urgent changes are needed to the way in which cash from central government is distributed to local authorities says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP is furious that the formula used by the Government to allocate the money puts Bournemouth higher in the list of deprivation than Pendle.

Prentice commented: "The Government has become detached from reality if they believe genteel, seaside Bournemouth is 40th in the list of most deprived areas and Pendle is 92nd!" This defies the evidence from our own eyes."

"The Government uses an inadequate and incomplete range of criteria to assess relative deprivation which ignores, for example, levels of car ownership, the number of people with long term illnesses which affects their ability to get out and about, the number of homes without central heating and so on. If these were included we would be getting extra cash from the Government instead of losing it."

"The system is absolutely indefensible when all the local authorities in North East Lancashire will be losing out in the year from April 94. I shall be pressing for an urgent review."

Note to Editors: Last week, the Government forced through Parliament the 1994/5 financial settlement for all local authorities in England. The Pendle MP told the House of Commons that the settlement was "savage" for North East Lancashire and for Pendle. The Government said the Council should spend 7% less next year (from April 94) than in the current year.

The Social and Economic Index measures deprivation. (1 is most deprived; 500 is least deprived.)

For Immediate Release: 7 February 1994
36/94

MP HAILS LOW PAY INITIATIVE BY BISHOP OF BURNLEY

Last Friday's conference on low pay in East Lancashire, organised by Hyndburn Borough Council and supported by the Bishop of Burnley, the Rt Revd Martyn Jarrett, has been hailed as a first rate initiative by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP - who sat in on the morning sessions - said afterwards: "After only a couple of days in his new job, the Bishop bravely ventured into this controversial area. It was unfortunate the Government Social Security Minister (Alistair Burt) who had promised to speak, pulled out at the last moment and, despite every effort by the organisers, no other member of the Government could be found to step into the breach. In the event we had thoughtful and stimulating contributions from my colleagues, Frank Field MP and Mike Hindley MEP."

Prentice continued: "North East Lancashire is a notorious low pay blackspot which was graphically confirmed last year by Channel 4's *Cutting Edge* . This programme drew attention to the scandal of low pay in Pendle, Burnley, Blackburn and Preston. We also have the evidence of the Manchester Low Pay Unit which showed that in five Job Centres in Lancashire in September 1992, 11.4% of jobs were offering £2.60 an hour or less and 85.5% were at £3.60p or less. I know from people coming to my own surgery that things haven't got any better since then and the scandal of poverty pay is still rife in the area."

"When my colleague Peter Pike raised the issues in the Commons last October he was told by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment, Ann Widdicombe, *"it makes no sense at all, in a time of recession, to try to eliminate low pay if the result is no pay."*

"Given these views - and the undertaking given by the Minister to visit the area to discuss low pay with the people living there - it was most unfortunate indeed that the Conservative case for low pay went unspoken."

Note to Editors: Pendle Borough Council jointly sponsored the initiative.

For Immediate Release: 10 February 1994
37/94

MP WARNS SUNDAY TRADING BILL COULD FOUNDER

Moves to liberalise the law on Sunday trading - which would allow all shops to open on Sundays for a specified number of hours - were thrown into fresh doubt last night following votes in the House of Commons on key employment protection and premium payments clauses.

Just before Christmas, the Commons voted in favour of partial deregulation of Sunday trading - removing the antiquated distinctions of the 1950 Shops Act which, for example, make it unlawful to sell a bible on a Sunday but lawful to sell a pornographic magazine.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who voted for the restrictions on Sunday trading to be eased, was scathing about those who voted for deregulation but against safeguards on employment protection.

"I have absolutely no objection to shops opening on Sundays but there must be no compulsion on shopworkers. It should be entirely voluntary and there should be premium pay. We have to ensure that job applicants who do not want to work on Sundays are not discriminated against. And those who are in

work must not suffer any detriment, for example, in promotion prospects because they choose not to work on Sundays."

"I have made it crystal clear all along that I will not vote for this Bill at third reading (the last legislative stage before a Bill becomes law) if I am not satisfied the employment protection measures are watertight."

For Immediate Release: 7 February 1994
38/94

PENDLE MP SLAMS "WASTE AND INCOMPETENCE"

Waste and incompetence are endemic features of this Conservative Government according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster following the publication of the Public Accounts Committee report on the serious failures in administrative and financial systems and controls within Government Departments and other public bodies.

The MP said: "The Government can waste millions without apology and then lecture the rest of us on financial prudence. They force councils like Pendle into a financial straightjacket and then allow quangoes to squander public money without batting an eyelid. The PAC report is an astonishing catalogue of waste."

"In addition to all this waste and incompetence we are seeing the criminal neglect of our manufacturing industry. Rover is now bought out by BMW of Germany and leaves Rolls Royce and Reliant as the only British owned car manufacturers. The President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, has been talking as if the German takeover is a great victory."

"He obviously believes the bigger the whopper, the greater the chance of people believing it. But this is what he said in his 1987 book Where There's a Will: *"It is simply not an option for the British Government to tell the country's motor industry to make its own way in the world... An ominous development has been an increase in foreign ownership and control. Foreign investment and interest is, of course, to be welcomed, but control has its dangers. For the major parts of the British motor industry to fall entirely into foreign hands would leave it a hostage to decisions in Detroit, Paris, Turin and perhaps Tokyo."*

ends

Note to Editors: The report cites, amongst others, the following examples of waste:

Waste and incompetence jibe

- Wessex Regional Health Authority wasted at least £20m on a regional information systems plan which they subsequently abandoned.

- West Midlands Regional Health Authority wasted £10m due to shortcomings in the financial control and accountability of their Regionally Managed Services Organisation.

• The Department of Employment engaged consultants in a haphazard way. The report questions whether the taxpayer got value for money from the £11m spent of this.

• The breakdown of the Property Services Agency financial system meant they could not recover £65.6m from customers.

Other examples of waste abound:

• In 1992, the last year for which figures are available, the amount of uncollected tax that was written off was a staggering £1.6 billion - double the previous year. The fuel tax will raise £950m in this, the first year.

• £450 has been spent on implementing and then continually re-writing the national curriculum.

• £30m was wasted on the abortive move of the prison service HQ to Derby

• £2.1m was spent on a Parents' Charter leaflet.

For Immediate Release: 8 February 1994
39/94

MP DUBS RED TAPE BILL "A CONSTITUTIONAL OUTRAGE"

The Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill which promises to cut red tape has been dubbed "fraudulent" and a "constitutional outrage" by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP told the Commons this week that the Bill contained "Henry VIII" clauses which gave absolute powers to Government Ministers to ride roughshod over Parliament. "This Bill gives Ministers the power to repeal and amend primary legislation with the stroke of a pen. It is a constitutional outrage."

"The Bill will allow privatisation by stealth with major public service organisations being moved into the private sector without the need for detailed debate in Parliament. The Bill shows a contemptuous disregard for process and procedure."

The MP told the House: "The Government's so called *Deregulation Task Forces* looked at 3,500 regulations of which 71% have been introduced since 1979. No fewer than 21% - just over one fifth - have been introduced since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990. It is ludicrous for the Government to suggest that regulations are a spillover from a socialist past."

"The Conservatives are responsible for most of the red tape they are now making such a song and dance about repealing."

For Immediate Release: 9 February 1994
40/94

PENDLE MP BACKS NATO MOVE

NATO's decision today to step up the pressure on the Bosnian Serbs has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who described the latest developments as "long overdue".

The MP was speaking in West Bowling, Bradford, after the funeral of his constituent, Paul Goodall, the humanitarian aid worker who was slain in Bosnia on Friday, 28 January.

The MP said: "Paul Goodall's life will not have been sacrificed in vain if - as now seems possible - the West and the United Nations act purposefully to end the slaughter and the barbarism. The siege of Sarajevo must be lifted."

"The people of Bosnia need the protection of the international community and we should unhesitatingly give it."

"The service this afternoon in a crowded St Stephen's Church was a sad but moving farewell to a very brave man."

For Immediate Release: 9 February 1994
41/94

CURRY PULLS OUT OF KEY DECISIONS ON COUNCIL REVIEW

The Minister for Local Government and Planning, David Curry MP, will not be involved in the Government's decisions on the Local Government Commission's recommendations for Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. It is yet to be settled whether he will be involved in the Commission's recommendations on the future council map of Lancashire and Cumbria.

The news comes after months of painstaking probing by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency lies alongside Mr Curry's Skipton and Ripon.

"Last November, Mr Curry was openly calling on people to support a Craven/Ribble Valley link up and at the time he said he would not be involved in decisions affecting his constituency. I have now winkled out this admission that he will not get involved in any decisions affecting three English Counties - rather wider than a mere constituency - and that is as it should be. He can now say whatever takes his fancy."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP tabled a Parliamentary question to the Secretary of State for the Environment asking what additional guidance he intended to give to the Local Government Commission on the conduct of the Review following the High Court decision on Lancashire on 28 January. John Gummer replied:

"The review of local government in England and the work of the Local Government Commission will continue. The Government is not appealing against the court ruling, which makes it clear that the Local Government Commission exercises its own judgement
something that has never been in dispute. The Commission's reviews will continue of the basis of the policy guidance issued in November 1993 with the omission of the final sentence of paragraph 3. The aim of the Local

Government review continues to be to provide effective and convenient local government which takes account of community identities. The Government believes that unitary authorities will often be the best way of achieving these objectives. In those cases they will be able to reduce costs and improve the quality and co-ordination of services. They will therefore often provide the best form of local government. Decisions will be taken on Commission recommendations in that light. However there is no national blueprint and the Government does no rule out consideration o£ two tiers in particular circumstances, with or without changes to the status quo, where a strong case for that is made."

Embargoed until: 12 February 1994
42/94

OPEN GOVERNMENT MINISTER TOLD "PRACTISE WHAT YOU PREACH"

The Minister for Open Government and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, William Waldegrave MP, has been told by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to practise what he preaches and open up meetings of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster to the public.

The Open Government Minister, who chairs the secret meetings, told the Pendle MP that "*Meetings of the Duchy Council and of the Trustees of the Benevolent Fund are held as and when necessary to deal with relevant business. These meetings are private and the Minutes are only available to those who are present."*

The Minister was replying to an earlier letter from the Pendle MP requesting a calendar of meetings and for sight of the minutes of meetings held over the past twelve months.

Prentice commented: "You could have knocked me over with a feather duster when I read the letter. I intended going along to one of these meetings to find out precisely what is discussed. For a Lancashire Member of Parliament to be told by the Minister for Open Government of all people that he can't observe the meetings of the Duchy of Lancaster is, quite frankly, unacceptable."

"I have tabled an Early Day Motion which will appear on the Commons Order Paper this Monday (14 February) when the Chancellor of the Duchy will be answering questions in the House. The Order Paper will also carry a question I tabled earlier asking what the Chancellor is doing to make the Council of the Duchy more representative of the population of Lancashire in terms of gender, race and social class. But Mr Waldegrave's letter raises an even more fundamental issue - open government."

"The Duchy Council is stuffed full of old Etonians, meeting in secret to disburse hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money. The Duchy has more in common with the freemasons that with an elected local council of the type the Conservatives are so fond of rubbishing."

"My Commons motion calls on the Minister to open the meetings of the Duchy to the public, publish minutes and follow the custom and practice of democratically elected local authorities."

ends

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP's EDM reads:

> "This House deplores the practice of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster, chaired by the Minister for Open Government and Chancellor of the Duchy, of meeting in secret, "as and when necessary" with minutes circulated only to those present to consider important matters including the distribution of hundreds of thousands of pounds of public money and calls on the Chancellor of the Duchy to open the meetings to the public, publish minutes and follow the custom and practice of democratically elected local authorities."

The Membership of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster is as follows:

William Waldegrave MP, Chancellor of the Duchy (Eton)
Timothy Lloyd QC, Duchy Attorney General (Winchester)
Major Sir Shane Blewitt KCVO, Duchy Receiver General (Ampleforth)
Mr Justice Morritt, Vice Chancellor of the County Palatine (Eton)
Sir Michael Bunbury Bt (Eton)
Sir Simon Towneley KCVO (Stowe)
Prof Christopher Howes CB (Gresham's)
Mr J. R. Sclater (Charterhouse)

Embargo: 11 February 1994
43/94

PENDLE MP VOTES TO BAN TOBACCO ADVERTISING

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will vote today to ban tobacco advertising. He will support Kevin Barron's Private Members' Bill aimed at reducing smoking among young people.

Gordon Prentice, said: "The Tobacco Advertising Bill will definately cut smoking among young people. We know that adults cut back - probably becuase of ever rising tobacco taxes. But what has happened to children's rates? No significant change has been reported by OPCS. Of 15 year olds, 24% were smoking regularly in 1982 and 23% were regular smokers in 1992. The decision to smoke is made by the age of 15 for more than 80% of smokers. It is not a decision taken in adulthood as a mature choice."

"If young people start smoking it is incredibly difficult to shake the habit. And if they can't then premature death and disease follow as sure as night follows day. Estimates published after the last General Election by the Health Education Authority showed that of the 1,099 people a year who die in Pendle, 205 die from diseases caused by smoking.

"503 Pendle people a year are admitted to National Health Hospitals because of illnesses caused by smoking. These patients used an average of 25 hospital beds every day at an annual cost to the NHS of £1.05m."

For Immediate Release: 10 February 1994
44/94

PENDLE MP WELCOMES ACTION ON LIBERAL DEMOCRAT RACISTS

News that racist Liberal Democrats in Tower Hamlets face suspension from their Party this coming Sunday has been welcomed by Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

The Lib Dem councillors have been given an ultimatum. Unless they accept the findings of the internal inquiry that found the leaflets they produced had pandered to racism, they would be out on their ears.

The MP said: "At long last, the high command of the Liberal Democrats seems to be taking a grip. For as long as I can remember, the Lib Dems - and the Liberals before them - have run their Party as a kind of franchise operation - allowing people in every little town and village in the land to do and say exactly what they please. They scavenge for issues to take up which they think will win them local political advantage. Wider principles rarely come into it."

"A few months ago, I was disappointed to see a long standing member of the Pendle Liberal Democrats accuse those members of his Party who were calling for disciplinary action against the racist councillors in Tower Hamlets - as indulging in *political correctness*." *

"We know how the Focus leaflets work. We can live with all the hype, froth and invention which is their trademark. What I won't accept from anyone is that it is OK to pander to racism to win grubby votes that aren't worth having in the first place."

Note to Editors: See PR 9/94. 11 January - Lib Dem Whitewash on Racist Leaflets. *See*The Guardian* 17 November 1993

For Immediate Release: 14 February 1994
45/94

PENDLE MP APPLAUDS ACTION ON LIB DEM RACE LEAFLET ROW

News that the Lib Dem Branch in Tower Hamlets at the centre of the racist leaflet row has backed down from confrontation with the Party's leadership has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Tower Hamlets Lib Dems had been accused of using their Focus leaflets to pander to racism. The Party's London Executive told the branch it had to accept the findings of the internal Party inquiry that investigated the matter and, in future, submit its leaflets to the Party leadership for vetting.

The MP said: "This whole business leaves a very nasty taste in the mouth. It is in no-one's interest for any political party to encourage racism - least of all the Liberal Democrats whose record has, until now, been a good one."

"I was very sorry indeed to hear a Lancashire County Councillor and leading Liberal Democrat activist dismiss the whole business saying any attempt to discipline the people involved was just indulging in political correctness."

"I hope we can now draw a double line under this unfortunate affair."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP tabled the following Commons motion on Thursday 10 February: *"That this House applauds the action of the Liberal Democrats' London Region in issuing an ultimatum to the Liberal Democrat councillors in Tower Hamlets to accept the findings of the internal party inquiry which found that Focus leaflets pandered to racism; but regrets that purposeful action to root out racism in the Liberal Democrats has been dismissed by the Liberal Democrat Lancashire County Councillor, Tony Greaves, as 'political correctness'."*

For Immediate Release: 14 February 1994
46/94

"LIFT THE FATWA AGAINST SALMAN RUSHDIE" says PENDLE MP

On the fifth anniversary of the issuing of the fatwa against *Satanic Verses* author, Salman Rushdie, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called on the Government to redouble its efforts to persuade the Iranian Government to lift the death threat.

Prentice has condemned the fatwa as a contravention of international law and of human rights and freedom of expression and in a Commons Early Day Motion has demanded the Iranian Government be held directly responsible for Salman Rushdie's safety.

The MP said: "Rushdie has now been in hiding for five years and unless the fatwa is lifted he will spend the rest of his life wondering where and when somebody is going to kill him. Mr Rushdie has the right to freedom of expression, as does everyone else, and it is quite appalling that his life has been put in jeopardy in this way."

"The Government must continue to apply steady and insistent pressure to get this death threat lifted. We live in a secular society where people must have the right to say what they like about particular faiths - even where it may be considered offensive. I started to read the *Satanic Verses* but gave up after a few chapters. I found it dense and impenetrable. I also know that some people find it offensive and blasphemous but that is no reason why it shouldn't be published."

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994
47/94

COST OF CRIME SOARS IN LANCASHIRE

Since 1988, the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in Lancashire has soared by a staggering 83% according to figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The amount stolen per household in Lancashire in 1988 was £130.20p. In 1992 this increased to £237.70p.

Prentice said: "We should take no comfort from the fact that our increase is slightly lower than the average for England and Wales (94% increase). What we are seeing across the country is a horrifying increase in crime under the so called Party of "law and order".

"The spiralling increase in crime in our county literally costs a fortune. Insurance premiums have increased massively. For example, Royal Insurance was reported last year to have increased its premiums for households by an average of 20% over the past two and a half years. And now the Conservatives are adding a 3% Insurance Premium Tax to bills for house insurance, car insurance, insurance against redundancy and many others."

"The plain fact is that Government policies make people more insecure. They then encourage people to take out private insurance against their failings. And, finally, they tax them when they do."

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994
48/94

NORTH WEST CLEAN UP NEEDED

Shock figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show the quality of the environment in the North West is nose-diving. On almost every measure of environmental neglect, the region has the dubious distinction of being at the bottom of the list.

Prentice commented: "After 14 years of Conservative Government, the North West has the worst bathing water; the worst river quality, the highest concentrations of lead in the blood and the most derelict land. What a chilling catalogue."

"Exposure to lead can have adverse effects on the way in which children's intelligence and behaviour develops. People are exposed to lead via the air (though this is declining due to lead free petrol), through water (due to lead piping) or food (through plants which have absorbed lead through the air or from fertilisers)."

"It's time the Government cleaned up its act. The North West gets the wooden spoon for far too many measures of environmental neglect."

Notes to Editors:

Bathing Water Quality - percentage of identified bathing beaches failing to comply with EC Bathing Water Directive:

Rank	Region	%
1	Anglia	6%
2	Wessex	8%
3	Yorkshire	9%
4	South West	13%
5=	Wales	24%
5=	Southern	24%
7	Northumbria	41%
8	North West	67%

Quality of Rivers and Canals - percentage poor or bad

Rank	Region	%
1	Northumbria	3%

2=	Welsh	6%
2=	Wessex	6%
4	Thames	7%
5=	Southern	8%
5=	Anglia	8%
7	Severn Trent	12%
8	Yorkshire	15%
9=	South West	19%
9=	North West	19%

Concentrations of lead in Blood: The third and fourth columns show the regional rankings for men and women respectively

Rank	Region	Men	Women
1=	East Anglia	4	1
1=	Inner London	2	3
3	Northern	1	5
4	South East (outside London)	7	2
5	Outer London	5	5
6	Wales	3	8
7	South West	6	6
8	East Midlands	8	9
9	Yorkshire/Humberside	11	7
10	West Midlands	10	10
11	Scotland	11	12
12	North West	12	12

Derelict Land. This land so damaged by industrial or other development that it is incapable of beneficial use without treatment. Derelict land can pose a public health hazard and increase development pressures on greenfield sites. The public has a right to know which areas of land are contaminated. Following pressure from the Labour Party, a legal obligation for local authorities to compile a public register of contaminated land was included in the 1990 Environmental Protection Act. Almost four years later, the Government has still not implemented this.

Rank	Region	Area (hectares)
1	East Anglia	600
2	Greater London	1,400
3	South East (ex London)	1,800
4	East Midlands	4,400
5	West Midlands	5,600
6	South West	5,800
7	North	5,900
8	Yorkshire/Humberside	6,100
9	North West	8,800

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994

49/94

FLAGSHIP LEGISLATION "TAINTED BY FIRMS GIVING TORY PARTY MILLIONS"

"Flagship legislation on deregulation which goes into Committee today for detailed line by line scrutiny has been tainted by *"Task Forces"* loaded with paying supporters of the Tory Party, claims Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says influence is being bought.

"The Deregulation Bill aims to review up to 7,000 regulations, many of which concern public safety, but which are criticised by Ministers for adding to business costs. Last year seven task forces were established to trawl through all the current laws. Their reports, which cost the taxpayer £120,000, are not to be made public. Ministers appointed leading industrialists to the committees from 12 firms which have donated a total of £3.5m to the Tories.

The Pendle MP's analysis of the membership of the *"Task Forces"* shows:

- 12 companies made a total of 88 donations to the Tory Party worth £2.8m

- 55 donations to four key Tory organisations were also paid worth nearly £700,000

- 4 of the 7 committees are actually chaired by people from Tory-donor companies

Prentice - who is a member of the Commons Committee scrutinising the Bill, commented: "These *Task Forces* excluded representatives of consumer organisations like the National Consumer Council, Passenger Users Councils or any of the Utilities' Consumer Councils. There are no consumer representatives on the deregulation task forces because businesses who pay the Conservative Party have taken their places."
"For example the Committee examining construction regulations is chaired by Chris Spackman, MD of Bovis whose parent company P&O has paid nearly £1 million to the Tories. (see 3 below)

"For the Conservatives, deregulation is about more than cutting unnecessary red tape. It is about allowing companies the freedom
to exploit, to drive wages lower and to worsen terms and conditions."

At its first morning session today, the Pendle MP told the Deregulation Bill Committee that when the Wages Councils were abolished last August people were told it would free up the labour market and have no effect on wage levels. "Michael Heseltine has told us that deregulation will be a liberating and invigorating force. He should tell that to people in the North West where the Manchester Low Pay Unit has just published an authoritative survey of wage levels in industries which used to be covered by the now abolished Wages Councils. Wages have fallen through the floor. Not a very liberating experience" said Prentice.

Note to Editors:

1. The seven Deregulation Task Forces cover Construction; Financial Services; Transport and Communications; Food Drink and Agriculture; Engineering Industries; Tourism and Other Services and Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals.

2. In addition to direct donations, task force businesses have been paying Conservative MPs and peers. Jerry Wiggin MP, is consultant to British Sugar who are represented on the Food Task Force. David Howell MP is paid by the Swiss Bank Corporation which is on the Finance Task Force). Tim Smith MP was paid by Price Waterhouse (Finance Task Force) prior to becoming a Minister this year. Jack Aspinwall MP is paid by BAA (on the Transport Task Force). Sir Geoffrey Pattie is paid by GEC which is on the Engineering Task Force. And Lord Peter Walker is paid by Dalgety - represented on the Food etc Task Force.)

3. Other Tory donors well represented on the Construction task force include MacAlpine, Slough Estates and Norcros plc. Mr Spackman told New Builder magazine (2.4.93) *"We have to be drastic - for example killing off the building regulations".* Does this mean, for example, that the requirement to insulate new houses could disappear? Home insulation firms don't know because they haven't been consulted."

For Immediate Release: 15 February 1994
50/94

PHOTOCALL

EARBY COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL
1.30pm on Wednesday 16 February

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting Earby County Primary School, Bailey Street, Earby at 1.30pm, tomorrow, Wednesday, 16 February 1994, at the invitation of Miss Vicky Lee, one of the pupils, to look at the School Science Exhibition "All Change".

For Immediate Release: 16 February 1994
51/94

PENDLE JOBLESS RISES SHARPLY

The number of people in Pendle who are unemployed and claiming benefit increased sharply last month. Figures released today (Wednesday) show that 2,968 people in the area are searching for work while claiming unemployment benefit.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "We are on the up escalator again. Our unemployment rate is up to 7.9% compared with the December 1993 rate of 7.4%. There has been a small increase in the number of vacancies at Colne Job Centre (115 from December's 96) but a corresponding decrease at Nelson (136 from 153) so it's swings and roundabouts. We also need to look at the type of jobs that are being lost and those that are being created. We need jobs that put a premium on skills."

"As everyone now knows, the way the figures are calculated masks the real number looking for a job."

Note to Editors: In January 1994 in Pendle 2,968 people were out of work and claiming benefit. This compares with the December figure of 2,772.

The 2,968 breaks down as follows: 2,299 men (10.6%) and 669 women (4.2%)

PENDLE JOB WATCH: Jobless totals since John Major became PM
from Gordon Prentice MP

Unemployed	Date	Rate	Colne	Vacancies	Nelson
1708	Nov-90	4.5			
2037	Dec-90	5.3			
2199	Jan-91	5.7			
2286	Feb-91	5.9			
2467	Mar-91	6.4			
2494	Apr-91	6.5			
2548	May-91	6.6			
2608	Jun-91	6.8			
2752	Jul-91	7.1			
2815	Aug-91	7.3			
2762	Sep-91	7.2			
2651	Oct-91	6.9			
2610	Nov-91	6.8			
2684	Dec-91	7			
3001	Jan-92	7.8			
2958	Feb-92	7.7			
2948	Mar-92	7.6			
3020	Apr-92	7.8			
3064	May-92	7.9			
3015	Jun-92	7.8			
3274	Jul-92	8.5			
3355	Aug-92	8.7			
3216	Sep-92	8.3			
2950	Oct-92	7.6	114	Oct-92	368
2822	Nov-92	7.3	110	Nov-92	236
3006	Dec-92	7.8	102	Dec-92	166
3161	Jan-93	8.2	49	Jan-93	160
3031	Feb-93	7.9	91	Feb-93	150
3025	Mar-93	7.8	93	Mar-93	128
2972	Apr-93	*7.9	87	Apr-93	158
2861	May-93	7.6	110	May-93	160
2928	Jun-93	7.8	113	Jun-93	176
3234	Jul-93	8.6	99	Jul-93	142
3237	Aug-93	8.6	121	Aug-93	155
3065	Sep-93	8.1	99	Sep-93	196
2783	Oct-93	7.4	124	Oct-93	349
2719	Nov-93	7.2	105	Nov-93	261
2772	Dec-93	7.4	96	Dec-93	153
2968	Jan-94	7.9	115	Jan-94	136

*change in method of calculating working population

For Immediate Release: 16 February 1994

53/94

BOYCOTT BENETTON says PENDLE MP

The fashion retailer Benetton was today accused of going one step too far with its latest advertising campaign showing the blood splattered clothes of a Bosnian Croat soldier, Marinko Gagro, who was killed last July near Mostar.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose humanitarian aid worker constituent, Paul Goodall, was brutally slain in Bosnia on 28 January described the advertisement as "sick and loathsome".

"They say all publicity is good publicity but, this time, I hope Benetton proves the old saying wrong. After their earlier ads showing a priest and nun kissing, a victim of aids dying, a baby, smeared with blood, still attached to the umbilical cord, I wasn't entirely sure where Benetton would turn next in order to shock us all. Now we know and it is unforgivable."

"I would like to see a consumer boycott of all Benetton shops. They are doing this for cheap publicity and name recognition and not for any higher purpose. They are not saying anything profound about the conflict in the former Yugoslavia."

"They should be ashamed of themselves. But I doubt they will be."

For Immediate Release: 16 February 1994
54/94

PRENTICE CONDEMNS LATEST HIKE IN PRESCRIPTION CHARGES AS "ANOTHER BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed yesterday's 50p hike in prescription charges which puts the cost up by 11.6% to £4.75. The increase follows the earlier one on 2 March last year which pushed prescription charges to £4.25 - then up by13%.

Speaking at Westminster today the MP hit out at the increase which is six times greater than the rate of inflation. "Last year I said the 1993 increase - which was eight times larger than the 1.5% pay norm the Prime Minister was seeking to impose - was a shock. But now "shocks" are commonplace - especially when it comes to tax.

Prentice said: "I entirely agree with Mr Nicholas Wood, the president of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, when he called it a tax on illness.

"It is another bitter pill the nation is expected to swallow."

ends

Note to editors: This is the 16th increase in prescription charges since 1979 when they stood at 20p

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994

55/94

MP WARNS OF "FALTERING RECOVERY"

Recent figures charting the performance of the economy have exposed the weakness of the current recovery says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster today, the MP said: "Over the past few days we have seen unemployment up, manufacturing output flat and a very unbalanced recovery. In Pendle, unemployment in January was sharply up on the month before and nationally the number of people out of work and claiming benefit (the claimant count) in January was 16,000 up on the December level. The so called "claimant count" is now 2,787,600 although the real number of people unemployed is undoubtedly much higher and getting even worse. On the Government's massaged figures, the number of people unemployed is 10.3% of the workforce."

"Manufacturing output is flat. Production figures show that recovery is very patchy. Manufacturing output fell slightly in December and in the fourth quarter of last year only grew by 0.5%."

"The recovery, such as it is, is also unbalanced. The Bank of England in its most recent quarterly inflation report noted that the main force driving the economy is consumer spending. This is confirmed by the most recent retail sales figures which show January retail sales up by 0.6% on December and 3.5% up on January 1993."

"It is this last point that points to the precarious state of the British economy. If consumer spending stalls with the tax hikes in April the economy could begin to contract again with alarming speed. In any event, a recovery based solely on increased consumer spending is undesirable. What we are not getting is an expansion of productive capacity. What we need above all else is more investment in productive capacity and people. We really do need a Business Plan for Britain."

Note to Editors: The increases in taxation could seriously arrest the recovery. The Government was elected on the promise to cut taxes and they have broken that promise. The tax increases are unfair. Though ordinary families will now be paying more tax than they did in 1979, those on £64,000 and above will still be paying less tax than they did in 1979. The taxes, including VAT on gas and electricity, hit hardest those who can least afford it.

The tax increases are to pay the cost of economic failure. They are not to pay for better schools, transport and hospitals - they are all being cut - but for high unemployment and low growth.

The tax burden on a two adult family with one earner, two children and on average earnings shows the family pays more of their income in direct tax than they did in 1979 and more of their income on indirect tax than in 1979.

	1978/9	1994/5
Direct Tax as % of earnings.....	20.9%	21.9%

Indirect Tax as % of earnings.....	11.3%	13%
Total Tax Burden.....	32.2%	35%

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994
56/94

HOPES RISE AS WATER SUBSIDES AFTER BARROWFORD FLOODING

New plans to tackle the problem of flooding in Barrowford have been welcomed by the area's MP, Gordon Prentice. The National Rivers Authority, North West Water and the local Borough council have been putting their heads together to find a solution to the problem which is causing heartache and misery to dozens of families.

The last flood on 19 December 1993 brought thousands of gallons of muddy water cascading into homes leaving them sodden and damp months later.

The MP said: "I am hopeful that things will now start to move. We have been told about the computer modelling of the sewerage network that has been commissioned and we have the plans of the NRA to deal with Pendle Water. In both cases, however, the timetable for carrying out the work is causing concern. North West Water will be able to comment in detail in about three months after it has analysed the computer modelling but they make no promises about getting the necessary work included early on in their capital programme. I shall be applying steady and insistent pressure on both organisations and I know the local council will be doing everything it can to help."

"The critically important issue that is still outstanding concerns insurance cover for properties and contents. If - as had been threatened - some insurance companies withdraw cover then the householders will be trapped in their water sodden homes for years to come while their children develop all sorts of breathing and health problems associated with the dampness. I am waiting to hear from the Director General of the industry's umbrella body, the British Association of Insurers, on what he proposes to do about it."

more follows

Note to Editors: This is the text of a letter, dated 14 February, from North West Water Chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher to the Pendle MP: "Thank you for your letter about flooding in Barrowford. It seems, from contemporary press reports, that there have been flooding problems in the area dating back at least one hundred years.

"I can confirm that the particular incident on 19 December 1993 was caused by debris obstructing the inlet to a land drainage culvert, not the responsibility of North West Water, which resulted in flow passing overground and overwhelming the local sewerage system.

"As you state, there is a relationship between the sewerage system and the river. The sewerage network carries both foul sewage and a large proportion of

rainwater from buildings and highways. It is designed to spill excess flows in times of severe rainfall into Pendle Water, via a combined sewage overflow in Pendle Street, which is consented by the National Rivers Authority (NRA). This prevents both flooding in the locality and overloading of the downstream sewers. However, in times of high river flow the overflow cannot operate and there is a risk of the sewerage system being unable to contain all the flows within it.

"I understand that the work the NRA will carry out on Pendle Water will not bring any improvement in the performance of the sewer network and, in extreme conditions, could make it worse.

"A computer model of the sewer network is presently being developed and this will be used to examine the relationship between river level and sewer network performance and to develop potential solutions. The results of this work should be available in about three months. We will be able to indicate some outline options at the meeting on 17 February but our representative will stress the preliminary nature of these.

"North West Water has always regarded relief of property from flooding as a very high priority. This financial year we expect to have removed over 350 properties from the register of properties at risk of flooding and we will be continuing at a similar rate next year. Each case is assessed individually for cost effectiveness and until the cost of resolving the Barrowford problem is defined, it is not possible to confirm its inclusion in the programme. Furthermore, our overall investment priorities for the ten years from 1995 are presently being examined by the Director General of OFWAT, as part of the "Periodic Review" of water companies. Our plans beyond April 1995 will depend on the outcome of the Review.

Embargo: 22 February 1994
57/94

PENDLE MP SLATES "SEXIST" GARDEN PARTIES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging the Queen to cut out the "sexist and anachronistic" practice of inviting people to Royal Garden Parties - with their unmarried daughters, but only if they are aged between 18 and 25.

The MP has again tabled an Early Day Motion in the Commons which asks Prime Minister to have a word in the Sovereign's ear. Prentice said: "Last February, John Major had plenty to say in his Carlton House speech about the dangers of clinging to *"outmoded habits, rules and restrictions"* and if anything falls into that category, this does."

Prentice continued: "Why 18 - 25? Why unmarried? Why just daughters? Why treat Royal Garden Parties in the 1990s like a 1950s Debs Ball? Why on earth continue with a practice so totally out of tune with contemporary Britain? The practice just invites ridicule."

"I am also asking Ministers whether this sort of banality contravenes the Sex Discrimination Act."

ends

Note to Editors: There are three Buckingham Palace Garden Parties this year on 12 July, 19 July and 21 July. The EDM reads: "That this House notes that invitations to Royal Garden Parties are typically extended to "any unmarried daughters who are aged between 18 and 25 years of age" and considers this anachronistic and totally out of keeping with contemporary Britain and again calls on the Prime Minister, in the light of his Carlton House speech of 3 February 1993 when he warned of the dangers of clinging to "outdated habits, rules and restrictions", to advise the Sovereign to abandon this overtly sexist and discriminatory practice which nowadays is likely to invite ridicule."

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994
58/94

MP PUSHES FOR COMMONS DEBATE ON HARTLEY HOSPITAL

The future of Hartley Hospital in Colne is to be aired in the House of Commons if local MP, Gordon Prentice has his way. He has applied to the Speaker for an early debate on the old hospital which has been empty for years and is now beginning to decay.

Prentice said: "This hospital was was given in trust to the people of Colne by the Hartley family whose name was made famous by their jams. It is now slowly and majestically decaying while the Regional Health Authority scratches around for a buyer."

"Our fear is that bulldozers will suddenly materialise and demolish the buildings before we know what is happening and that a cleared site would have no difficulties in getting planning permission for housing of some other use. I have written to Sir Bruce Martin, the chair of the RHA, seeking assurances on this point."

"I have also been in touch with the Secretary of State for Health asking her to intervene but, typically, she declines to get involved.

"My own preference is for the buildings, which are set in attractive grounds and with beautiful views, to be made over to hospice use but there are other alternatives which merit serious consideration. Whatever else happens, the whole sage deserves to get a good airing."

For Immediate Release: 21 February 1994
59/94

CLEVELAND GUEST RESCUE WELCOMED

Colne Engineering firm, Cleveland Guest, which called in the receiver on 23 November last year looks to be safe for the moment according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP met the receivers last Friday to talk through the rescue package which has been underwritten by Lancashire Enterprises and Nat West bank.

Prentice said: "I am obviously relieved that most jobs have been saved and that the firm will continue as a going concern. There are some important

issues concerning contracts of employment that are the subject of discussion between the receivers and the trade unions there and we wait to see what unfolds."

"I was also reassured to hear that an independent trustee has been appointed to look after the interests of members of the Pension Fund. This was a matter of some concern."

Note to Editors: Last November the Pendle MP launched a scathing attack on the Prime Minister at question time in the Commons. He told the House the Prime Minister had written to him as recently as 29 July 1993 specifically mentioning Cleveland Guest and wishing them well. The firm promptly went into receivership. At the time the MP said: "Many questions need to be asked about the management and direction of this company but my top priority is to save the jobs of the people who work there. That's the bottom line."

Cleveland Guest are precision engineers manufacturing components for the aerospace and other industries. Its holding company is Habit PLC who manufacture and sell piston rings, diamond tools and specialist services in the precision engineering and construction industries. Its Swedish parent is Darcos Holding AB (Sweden).

For Immediate Release: 22 February 1994
60/94

SCHOOLS RADIO CHANGES WORRY PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has expressed concern about changes to schools radio programmes announced recently by the BBC.

Schools programmes, which are used by an estimated 90% of UK primary schools and represent a vital learning resource for many increasingly hard-pressed local schools, are presently broadcast between 9.00am and 10.25am on Radio 5. The BBC, however, has announced that it is moving the programmes to make way for the new "Radio 5 Live" news and sport network. From April, they will be broadcast between 2.00pm and 3.00pm on Radio 3FM.

The MP said: "I am worried about the effect these changes will have. First, they will reduce by a third the number of hours of schools programmes, which are in the finest tradition of the BBC's public service remit.

"Secondly, I am concerned that the new afternoon slot may not suit schools as well as the present morning one. The BBC says that schools which find the new time inconvenient should tape the programmes for use at a time more suitable for them - but this assumes that all the primary schools in Pendle have the time, staff, and equipment to do this. The BBC admits that live broadcasts of concerts on Radio 3 may run into the time allocated for schools programmes."

"I have therefore written to every primary school head in Pendle, asking what effect these changes will have on their schools and whether they are concerned by the lack of consultation taken in making the decision. I will take the matter up with the BBC if the
results of this survey show that the new time is not convenient for our local schools.

For Immediate Release: 23 February 1994
61/94

IT'S ALL CHANGE AT THE PALACE says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has withdrawn his Early Day Motion which he tabled at the Commons earlier this week following news that invitations to Royal Garden Parties will, for the first time, be extended to the unmarried *sons* and daughters of guests - provided the offspring are aged between 18 and 25.

Until now, the invitations were only extended to guests' unmarried daughters - and then only if a certain age.

The MP said: "I suppose this is progress of sorts. But why do they need to be unmarried? And why this age discrimination?"

"The Royal Garden Parties are probably very quaint affairs but I'm not entirely sure what purpose they serve - or what the unmarried daughters and sons (aged between 18 and 25) are supposed to get out of the experience."

Note to Editors: There are three Buckingham Palace Garden Parties this year on 12 July, 19 July and 21 July. The EDM reads: "That this House notes that invitations to Royal Garden Parties are typically extended to "any unmarried daughters who are aged between 18 and 25 years of age" and considers this anachronistic and totally out of keeping with contemporary Britain and again calls on the Prime Minister, in the light of his Carlton House speech of 3 February 1993 when he warned of the dangers of clinging to "outdated habits, rules and restrictions", to advise the Sovereign to abandon this overtly sexist and discriminatory practice."

For Immediate Release: 23 February 1994
62/94

MP SLAMS CUTS IN BOSNIA TROOPS

News that redundancy notices are to be served on 7,000 British troops tomorrow - including soldiers serving in Bosnia - has brought a sharp reaction from Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"It is simply incredible that redundancy notices - some of them compulsory - are being served on soldiers on active duty. The defence cuts are being carried through in an ill-considered, scissors and paste, fashion by a Government that personifies waste and incompetence."

"The Labour Party is committed to reducing defence expenditure but this should follow a full Defence Review where all the options are properly examined. What we have at the moment is the worst kind of ad hocery."

"This is a Government that wasted £160m on the ridiculous secret bunker under the Ministry of Defence. The entrance was so small that all the equipment destined for the bunker had to be taken to bits and then re-assembled inside. And then there was the scandal of the foreign practice shells

which were bought by the MOD that didn't work at all. Not even the tiny explosion they were designed to make."

"The Government's record on real, live shells is just as bad. The Government turned prevarication and hesitation into an art form while deciding whether or not to give firm orders to Royal Ordnance in Blackburn."

For Immediate Release: 28 February 1994
63/94

MP BLASTS "QUANGOLAND"

The growth of quangos - the unelected bureaucracies now running many of our public services - has been blasted by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster earlier this week, the MP said: "When the Tories came to power in 1979 they pledged to sweep away quangoes and restore powers to local people. Yet again, they have done precisely the opposite to what they promised."

"Quango spending is now three times higher than in 1979. It has risen 20% faster than inflation. And quangoes now control one fifth of all public spending - £47000 million in total - and have no fewer than 40,000 members. This compares with the 25,000 County and District councillors."

The MP continued: "Decisions that affect the real lives of ordinary families on hospital closures, the future of schools and colleges and training opportunities are being taken behind closed doors by unelected people. Quangoes and central government have now taken direct control from locally elected people of over £4,500 million in spending in the fields of education, transport and urban development. Local elected people now have no say at all in the running of two vital services - training and health which, between them, spend £19,600 million a year."

"The whole thing is getting completely out of hand."

Note to Editors: The Conservatives will not publish information on donations to the Tory Party by individuals who are appointed to quangoes. We can only find out by looking at company accounts if the firm of which they are a director or chair is a contributor. Examples are ten a penny. The chairman of British Nuclear Fuels until recently was Sir Christopher Harding, the chairman of BET, which gave £25,000 to the Tories in march 1993. He is also a non executive director of Hanson, which gave £100,000 to the Conservatives in 1992.

For Immediate Release: 28 February 1994
64/94

PENDLE MP APPLIES FOR A NEW JOB

Gordon Prentice, the MP for Pendle in North East Lancashire, has applied for a new job - as a member of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster. He has written to the Chancellor of the Duchy (who doubles up as Minister for Open

Government) asking for the job which he intends to run in tandem with his responsibilities at Westminster.

The MP said: "The Duchy of Lancaster distributes hundreds of thousands of pounds every year to organisations in the County yet the meetings where the decisions are taken are held in secret and the minutes are circulated only to those present. For this practice to be defended by the Minister of Open Government is faintly absurd."

"After months of poking around, and after making a nuisance of myself by asking lots of awkward questions, I have discovered that Sir Simon Townley, the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire - whom the Chancellor describes as one of his principal advisers on how this cash is distributed - has not attended a single meeting of the Duchy Council since 1987. As Sir Simon is obviously an incredibly busy person, I have therefore asked Mr Waldegrave if I can attend as Sir Simon's substitute when he cannot attend meetings."

The MP said: "The Duchy of Lancaster is a throwback to medieval England and no-one really knows how it works. I am just lifting the carpet and having a look at what is underneath."

Note to Editors: The MP's letter to Mr William Waldegrave MP, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for Open Government, reads:

"You already know of my interest in the affairs of the Duchy and I am writing to ask if you would consider appointing me to serve on the Duchy Council.

"I see from recent replies you have given to Parliamentary Questions tabled by me that one of your principal advisers on applications for financial assistance from the Duchy's Benevolent Fund is the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, Sir Simon Townley KCVO. You tell me that the Benevolent Fund was constituted as a charity in September 1993 and that the Trustees have met once since then and that, prior to that date, advice had been given at Council meetings.

"Since 1988, you tell me there have been 16 meetings of the full Council and the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire has not been present at one. He is obviously an incredibly busy person and I wonder if you would considering allowing me to act as Sir Simon's substitute when he cannot make it along to a meeting.

"This would have the additional advantage of allowing me access to the minutes of Duchy Council meetings which are only circulated to those attending the meetings. And I would also be informed of when meetings were due to be held - something that is currently secret."

For Immediate Release: 1 March 1994
65/94

COMMONS URGED TO PROTECT CONSUMERS FROM BOARDROOM EXCESSES AND PROFITEERING

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, urged the House of Commons this week to block the utility regulators from taking over some functions from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The MP is critical of the failure of the utility

regulators, such as OFWAT and OFFER, to curb massive profiteering and soaring boardroom payouts.

An amendment to the Deregulation Bill has been tabled in the key House of Commons Deregulation Committee.

Committee member, Gordon Prentice MP says: "The utility companies such as electricity and water have been milking the public. In the North West, what has been going in is nothing short of a scandal. Some of the people who chair the utility companies have seen their pay triple - in spite of doing the same job as before privatisation."

"Last year, electricity profits rose by almost 27%, while privatisation has pushed up prices more than two percent above inflation but electricity consumption actually fell. No wonder. Many people can't afford to heat their home. Water companies have been soaking their customers. Average rises since privatisation have been up to 25%. Customers are paying for all these profits and massive pay rises."

"In the electricity industry, 57 executives are getting £18.2 million in post-privatisation share options, while consumption has actually fallen. In the water industry, 48 bosses of the ten privatised companies have already cashed in share options of £4.5 million. Prices have risen by up to 25%."

"The amendment the Opposition will be moving will stop the regulators taking over the powers of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, pending a review of their powers. It is vital that the regulators show their ability to put consumers before utility shareholders before Parliament gives them any new powers. I am pressing the Minister to ensure that consumers get better representation from the utility regulators. "

Note to Editors: Last year the Pendle MP complained that customers throughout the North West had been "comprehensively ripped off by NORWEB ever since privatisation. We pay £43.36p a year in standing charges even before a single plug gets within striking distance of a socket. Even more of a scandal is the level of remuneration and perks for Norweb's top people. The accounts for last year (1992) show the chairman, Kenneth Harvey, salary increase from £105,135 in 1991 to £184,643 in 1992 - a ballistic increase of £1,529 per week. In 1993 his salary jumped from £184,643 to £208,287 - an increase of £23,644. £20,00 of this was dubbed a "performance related bonus".

The salary increases should be seen alongside the generous share options the Norweb Directors have awarded themselves. Kenneth Harvey has (at March 92) 157,629 share options (up from 108,080 share options at March 91) and three of his fellow executive directors have 80,187.

They can exercise their right to buy shares under the *Executive Share Option Scheme* for £3.11 between February 1994 and February 2001. If this scheme were operating today, the chairman of Norweb would make £266,393 straight profit on shares bought at £3.11 per share and sold at today's price of £4.80.

Executive Directors of Norweb and their interests

	Shares at March 92	Options at March 92	Shares at March 92	Options at March 91
K.G. Harvey	5,357	157,629	5,357	108,080
A. Crowder	7,142	-	7,142	-
B. Benson	5,455	46,430	5,455	46,430
M.G. Faulkener	7,525	82,158	7,525	56,633
G.P. McTague	500	-	-	-
A. Simmons	3,567	80,187	3,567	54,662
B.J. Wilson	2,351	80,187	2,351	54,662

Source: Norweb Financial Review 91/92.

On 10 December 1993, the Financial Times reported: *North West Water, the privatised utility, yesterday announced a 6 per cent increase in interim pretax profits to £138.2m and a slightly higher than expected dividend...*
The UK regulated water business showed a 16 per cent increase in operating profits to £168.3m. Turnover rose by 7 per cent to £369.6m. There was a £4.6m decline in industrial and commercial volumes.

For Immediate Release: 2 March 1994
66/94

FURY AS PENDLE MP LASHES "SLOPPY AND SLIPSHOD" MINISTER

The Minister for Open Government and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, William Waldegrave MP, has been blasted by Gordon Prentice, the MP for Pendle, for giving him incorrect information about the attendance record of the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire at meetings of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The furious MP said: "I have been campaigning for absolutely ages to get the veil lifted on the work of the Duchy of Lancaster - a body responsible for distributing over £500,000 of public money every year. On the basis of information given to me by Mr Waldegrave in an official reply to a Parliamentary Question of mine, I publicly called on the Minister to allow me to attend meetings of the Duchy Council as substitute for Sir Simon who, allegedly, never attended. Mr Waldegrave has now admitted the information he gave me was wrong."

"I have today written to Sir Simon to apologise for the embarrassment caused to him as a consequence of the incorrect information given to me by the Chancellor of the Duchy and I have again called on the Minister to publish the Minutes and allow me - a Member of Parliament for a Lancashire constituency - to attend meetings of the Duchy Council."

"The answer I received was a sloppy and slipshod piece of work. How many other mistakes has he made that have not, as yet, come to light?"

"If the minutes had been published in the first place this would never have happened" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: The following is the text of the letter sent by the Pendle MP to Mr Waldegrave today:

more follows

"Sloppy and slipshod" Open Government Minister

The letter reads:

"Contrary to the reply you gave in answer to an earlier Parliamentary Question of mine, you now tell me that the attendance record of the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire at meetings of the Duchy Council is 100%.

"This mistake of yours has horrified and embarrassed me and, I dare say, Sir Simon Towneley who featured prominently in the Lancashire Evening Telegraph this week denying the charge I had made that he never attended meetings of the Duchy Council. I have now written to Sir Simon to apologise for the embarrassment caused by the incorrect information you gave me.

"Surely this whole episode precisely illustrates the point I was making. If the minutes of the meetings of the Duchy Council had been available, and were not secret, this would never have happened.

"All this is now water under the bridge but I would ask you - as Minister for Open Government - to allow me, as a Member of Parliament for a Lancashire constituency, to sit in on meetings of the Duchy Council. And I would again urge you to publish the minutes.

Note to Editors 2: Grants to Pendle people from the Duchy Benevolent Fund for 1993 amount to £714 - £150 to an invalid in Colne, £500 to a handicapped person in Barnoldswick and £64 to another handicapped person in Barnoldswick. The Pendle MP commented: "£714 out of half a million for Lancashire isn't a lot. Pendle, after all, is one of only 14 local authorities in Lancashire. A lot of money will no doubt be going to county wide organisations and I am checking this out."

The Pendle MP asked the Minister to list all the organisations located within Pendle that had received grants from the Duchy since 1974. He was told by the Minister that collating this information would "entail disproportionate cost". The MP was given the 1993 figures (above).

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1994
67/94

MP CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO BACK AEROSPACE

The future of the country's aerospace industry is being put in jeopardy by the Government's unwillingness to give it the backing it needs to survive in a competitive world market, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP was speaking in last night's key debate on the future of British manufacturing in the wake of the decision of British Aerospace to sell Rover - the last British volume car manufacturer - to the Germans.

Michael Heseltine, the President of the Board of Trade, who opened the debate by saying the aerospace industry was *"a triumph"* was ridiculed by Prentice who accused Conservative members of *"existing on a different planet and operating in another dimension where they see things that other people do not see. They see growth, productivity and a booming economy where the rest of us just see dust."*

The MP told the House that Rover was taken over by BMW of Germany because British Aerospace had said it needed capital to develop the core aspect of its business - aerospace itself. Yet the Government doubted that the cost or availability of finance were more difficulties for manufacturing companies - a fact, said Prentice, directly contradicted by British Aerospace.

"Rolls Royce doesn't get half of the support its major competitors in the United States receive from the US Government. And the "launch aid" it gets from our Government - and which is dressed up as a big hand-out - actually comes in the form of a loan which has to be paid back. The Government's track record in building our vital manufacturing base is truly appalling" said Prentice.

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1994
68/94

PRENTICE SAYS NO HALF MEASURES

Moves to outlaw short measures are to be voted on in the House of Commons Deregulation Bill Committee today. Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, is dead against Government proposals to legalise short measures in pubs.

Before the 1992 election, the Government promised to outlaw short measures for beer drinkers. Now, Ministers have caved in to pressure from the brewing industry which donated nearly £2 million to the Tories. A survey in December carried out by West Midlands Trading Standards officers showed that in 21 pubs surveyed 85% of the pints were short - containing as much as 10% below a full pint. Recent surveys in London and Gloucestershire show the same.

The Pendle MP, who is a member of the Committee, says: "Ministers are legalising short measures for over 20 million beer drinkers who drink a total of 256 million pints every year. For years drinkers have had to put up with short measures. This is a disgraceful betrayal of consumers who are being forced to pay for a full pint but receive only 95% of a pint. Imagine if people were told they would only get 95% of the pint of milk they paid of, or only 11 eggs when they bought and paid for a dozen!"

"The price of beer has already risen by 25% above inflation in the past decade. Before the 1992 general election, the Consumer Minister, Edward Leigh promised action. In an official DTI press release (5.3.92) he said: "I strongly believe that consumers should get what they pay for, if a pint is ordered, a pint of liquid beer is what they should get."

The DTI told British glass manufacturers in 1985 to gear up to supplying measured glasses. Paul Edwards of Dema International of Derbyshire advised the DTI in March 1993 that they had spent £150,000 on new moulds and a further £28,000 on associated costs. He says: "The £178,000 is a non-recoverable cost." The largest glass manufacturer in the UK Ravenglass has spent nearly £1 million on retooling equipment and on new moulds. They had intended to take on 100 extra staff to make the new glasses. Some breweries have already introduced measured glasses. Wolverhampton & Dudley say they save money suppling larger 24OZ glasses because Trading Standards Officers don't have to calibrate their glasses. Instead their pumps deliver the measured pint which TSOs accept.

Prentice added: "Government dithering and now this U-turn has thrown the business into chaos. Companies have wasted large sums to prepare for this. What a shambles! The real losers are consumers and British glass companies and brewers who acted in good faith. Ministers have bowed to outside pressure from one vested interest group and changed their mind. They are not fit to hold office."

Note to Editors: Labour's Shadow Consumer Minister Nigel Griffiths MP says: "Of the 11 members of John Major's Deregulation Committee which recommended legalising short measures, two are from breweries (S&N group & Whitbread) who donated over £700,000 to the Tory Party. I am asking members of the Committee of Privileges to investigate the undesirable influence big companies are having on the business of the House of Commons. "

"Other brewery donations to the Tories are as follows: Allied Lyons £1,096,000, S&N £413,000 and Whitbread £297,000. A further nine breweries gave the Tories over £40,000 - the Vaux Group, Fuller Smith & Turner, Hardys & Hansons, Daniel Thwaites, Hall & Woodhouse, McMullen and Son's, Everards, Heavitree and Shepherd Neame."

"I believe the Tories did a deal with brewers before the last election. They were so desperate to buy their way back to power that they promised their brewer backers they'd drop their pre-election promise to beer drinkers. In return the Tories got big campaign donations."

"The 1989 Parliamentary Register of Members' Interest shows that the Deregulation Minister Neil Hamilton who is responsible for this measure was a paid consultant to the Brewers' Society, the major lobby organisation against the full pint."

Labour has the support of the Consumers Association (071 830 6000) and CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale representing small breweries and beer drinkers. CAMRA Campaign's Manager Stephen Cox (0727 867201) says: "The Government has decided to ignore consumer groups and trading standards officers. It has changed its policy twice in three years. The government are caving in to the usual vested interest."

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1994
69/94

GRANADA ON SUNDAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on Granada Television's Granada on Sunday this Sunday, 6 March to talk about the unfolding scandal of Boardroom pay and perks.

Granada on Sunday is on air at 12.25pm.

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994
70/94

MP CALLS FOR "REBALANCING" OF THE MAGISTRATES BENCH TO COUNTER TORY BIAS

People with Conservative Party leanings dominate the Magistrates' Bench even though most people in the area in which they sit support the Labour Party, according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was commenting on the analysis, published last week by his colleague, Stephen Byres MP, which showed that in a random sample of 17 areas, in every case the Conservatives have a higher percentage of support amongst magistrates than amongst the electorate and the Labour Party has, in every case, a lower level of support amongst magistrates than the electorate."

In Pendle, 79% of all magistrates expressed a political preference. 56% leaned to the Conservatives yet 40% of Pendle people voted Conservative at the last General Election. 28% of magistrates leaned to Labour yet 44% of people voted Labour in Pendle in April 1992. Only amongst the Liberal Democrats is there any kind of match. 16% of magistrates leaned to the Liberal Democrats and the Lib Dems took 15% of the vote at the General Election."

The MP continued: "Changes to the criminal justice system have undoubtedly persuaded many public spirited Labour inclined people to stay well clear of the Bench and we have also had a number of well publicised resignations. For people to have faith in the magistrates courts and in the justice they dispense, they must believe and accept that the Bench broadly reflects the spread of mainstream political opinion in the area. The figures for my area and for the country as a whole show this not to be the case."

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994
71/94

FUTURE OF HOSPITAL IS STILL "UP IN THE AIR" says PRENTICE

The future of Hartley Hospital in Colne is still uncertain according to local MP, Gordon Prentice, but he has been assured there are no plans to demolish the complex given to the People of Colne by the Hartley family, made famous and wealthy by their jams.

The Pendle MP has been told by property chiefs at the North West Regional Health Authority that offers for the old hospital have been pitched at an unacceptably low level. The health authority is now considering the possibility of redeveloping the hospital for residential use. "My office contacted the RHA

today about the rumours that have been flying about that the hospital has, in fact, been sold. However, I have been assured this is not the case."

Prentice said: "The RHA has been dithering about the future of this hospital for years now while spending a small fortune allegedly keeping it secure and properly maintained. The cost of keeping the buildings safe and sound has soared from £14,600 in March 1993 to a staggering £37,900 today yet I have grave doubts about how secure the buildings really are - and how effective the maintenance is."

"I have had hundreds of people contact me about this much loved Colne landmark. It is nothing short of a scandal that it is being allowed to rot away before our very eyes. I am pressing the Speaker to give me an early adjournment debate on the whole sorry saga."

Note to Editors: The Chairman of the Regional Health Authority, Sir Bruce Martin, told the Pendle MP on 22 February: "On the marketing of Hartley Hospital, the situation remains one of offers being received but which are either not at an acceptable level in valuation terms or the prospective purchaser has failed to secure the necessary finance.

"Consideration has been given to other ways of enhancing the marketability of the premises. One possible option under discussion is to submit an outline planning application for the redevelopment of the Hospital for residential purposes. No formal decision has however been taken.

"Although the Authority has no plans to demolish the Hospital, I would advise you that the cost of maintenance and security has risen by a further £23,300 since I last wrote to you on the matter in March 1993."

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994
72/94

MP RAPS GOVERNMENT OVER "CRIME EPIDEMIC"

The country is in the grip of a crime epidemic according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. In the North West since 1987, burglaries have increased by 12% and people in the region are now paying 18% more for their home contents insurance. Over the same period, car thefts in the North West have shot up 22% and car insurance costs have leapt by 27%.

Speaking at Westminster on Monday, the Pendle MP said the Government had neglected crime prevention as a key part of a successful strategy to combat crime. "The Government spends a derisory £15.6m on crime prevention out of a total budget for the criminal justice system of £8,800m. That's a measly 0.2% of their total budget - a pathetic 76p per family. Compare that to an average cost of crime of £228 for every family in 1992."

"For all their steely rhetoric, the Government's record on crime is pitifully weak. Crime has more than doubled since 1979. The clear up rate is down. Since 1979, the overall clear up rate has fallen by 37%. Only 20% of burglaries were cleared up in 1992 - and only 17% of cases of criminal damage solved."

"It is an appalling state of affairs when tales of vandalism, burglary and sundry other crimes crop up as regular topics at my constituency surgeries. People are getting angry about crime."

For Immediate Release: 7 March 1994
73/94

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY ON THE ROPES says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has returned to the attack over the future of British manufacturing industry. Last week in a hard hitting Commons speech he ridiculed the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, for paying lip service to the needs of industry while allowing ownership to transfer overseas. Last month, Rover, the last high volume British car maker was taken over by the Germans.

Speaking to Labour's Parliamentary Employment Committee this week, the Pendle MP said: "In Pendle we have seen a cascade of job losses in recent years. Nationwide the situation is dire. In 1979, manufacturing accounted for 28.5% of GDP or what we, as a nation, produced. In 1992 it accounted for only 22.3%. Under the Tories, manufacturing employment has fallen by 40% - from over 7.1m people to just 4.2m."

"Manufacturing has borne the brunt of the recession and we now have an unprecedented trade deficit. In 1983, the UK recorded its first ever trade deficit in manufactures of £2.7 billion and by 1992 this had grown to £7.4 billion. The Government has simply run out of excuses. We need to boost demand and supply and reverse a decade of manufacturing neglect with a decade of investment. And I want to see a cultural shift in attitudes to manufacturing. Making things that satisfy people's needs is not only worthwhile in itself. It is essential to secure the nation's future."

ends

Note to Editors: Manufacturing is being hit in three ways. There is a failure to invest. Britain has the second lowest level of investment in the OECD in terms of share of GDP. In 1993, total capital expenditure in manufacturing fell by 1%. Expenditure in pant and equipment (as opposed to buildings and vehicles) fell by 2%. There is a failure to innovate. In 1992, research and development expenditure in general manufacturing rose by only 1.4%. Total R&D employment fell by 5%. Government
assistance to business for R&D in 1992 fell by 5.5% in cash terms. There is a failure to develop skills. Skill levels in the UK are 40% below that of our main trading partners. Less than 40% of 16-18 year olds in the UK are
in full time education and training compared with over 80% in Germany and France.

There has been a failure of strategy at the Department of Trade and Industry under the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine. The coal industry has been destroyed. Pits are being closed not because they are uneconomic but because the Conservative Government has rigged the energy market against coal when it privatised the electricity industry.

The Government has muddled and delayed over its review of the nuclear industry - originally promised for this year but so far nothing has been heard of it.

For two years there has been uncertainty about the possible privatisation of the Post Office. We still wait for a definitive statement of the Government's intentions towards this key public service.

In his 1987 book, Where there's a will, Michael Heseltine said there were three key "platforms for industry" which the Government had a duty to preserve - steel, aerospace and the motor industry. They have failed on steel. 140,000 jobs were lost on the industry in the 1980s. While the European Union has fined British Steel, Government ministers have handed over £5 billion in subsidies to other European producers.

The Government has failed on aerospace. The industry is Britain's biggest exporter and employs 45% of all professional engineers. The Government's own Aviation Committee has noted that "the level of Government support for research and technology acquisition has declined... the outlook for the British aerospace technology base is giving cause for concern. In 1992, civil R&D expenditure fell by a massive 19.3%.

The Government has failed on the motor industry. We have now lost our last UK volume car manufacturer - Rover - to BMW. There is a a very real fear that the decline of 2.3% in R&D in the motor industry will accelerate .

Embargo: 9 March 1994
74/94

PRENTICE BACKS MOVE TO GIVE NEW RIGHTS TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The House of Commons will have the chance on Friday 11 March to give people with disabilities new rights under law and Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be enthusiastically backing the measure. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is the latest in a long line of measures to address the problem of discrimination against people with disabilities.

Prentice said: "Today (9 March) is the 50th anniversary of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act which established the present employment framework for people with disabilities but, with the passage of time and lack of enforcement, its provisions have lost their bite. Times have moved on. The social and political climate is vastly different from 1944 and it is time to act decisively to end the sometimes blatant - and often covert - discrimination against people with disabilities."

Note to Editors: RADAR adds: Today (9 March) marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, which established the present legal framework within which employment policy for disabled people is formulated. Over the past 15 years a number of reviews of the "Quota" have been instigated but no action has been taken with regards amending or replacing it. Instead, the Quota has been allowed to suffer a long decline over the same period, caused by the lack of enforcement.

- No prosecutions since 1975.

- The proportion of employers complying with the Quota has declined from 61.4% in 1961 to 20.4% in 1991.

- Registered disabled workers comprised 3% of the workforce in 1961, but only 1.3% in 1993.

There is clear evidence that disabled people choose not to register because they do not believe that there will be any benefit for them, rather than because of any reluctance to label themselves.

The future legislative framework for disability policy is surely represented by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which receives its Second Reading on 11 March, the latest in a long line of attempts to introduce anti discrimination legislation for disabled people.

It recognises the fundamental role which discrimination plays in disadvantaging disabled people, and would ban direct and indirect discrimination, as well as requiring employers to adapt the work-environment for disabled people, unless this would cause "undue hardship"

A particular strength of the Bill is that it provides a policy framework which embraces every aspect of disabled people's lives. The difficulty which disabled people have in accessing further and higher education, has an enormous impact on their employment prospects, as does the inaccessibility of public transport and of the built environment and public services generally.

Any measure which fails to provide comprehensive protection and a positive requirement that organisations modify their practices would prove totally inadequate to the task of opening up employment opportunities to disabled people. It is equally vital that an independent, strategic enforcement agency, a Disablement Commission, is established. Without this disabled people will lack the resources to bring cases, and provide guidance in the way that will be required to make the law more than a dead letter.

For Immediate Release: 9 March 1994
75/94

OPEN GOVERNMENT MINISTER DEFENDS LYING TO MPs

The Open Government Minister and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, William Waldegrave MP, told a House of Commons Committee yesterday that Parliament could be told untruths in "very, very exceptional circumstances". Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who clashed with the Minister a week ago after receiving a reply to a Parliamentary Question that was wrong, described the admission as "simply incredible".

"Mr Waldegrave has conceded that it is OK to be economical with the truth or, indeed, tell untruths to Parliament. And this from the Minister of Open Government!"

"I am still waiting to hear from the Minister about his reply to the Parliamentary Question I tabled which stated clearly that the Lord Lieutenant

of Lancashire, Sir Simon Towneley, had never attended any meetings of the Council of the Duchy of Lancaster since 1987. This prompted me to call on Mr Waldegrave to appoint me as Sir Simon's substitute! The reply was wrong and the information caused embarrassment to me and, I dare say, Sir Simon - to whom I have already personally apologised."

"In the light of this experience, I tabled last week a further question to the Minister asking him to list those answers to Parliamentary Questions since 1990 that have subsequently turned out to be incorrect. He told me that "such information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost."

"This flippant answer really takes the biscuit. What on earth has happened to integrity in the conduct of Government?"

For Immediate Release: 10 March 1994
76/94

MP WINS COMMONS DEBATE ON HARTLEY HOSPITAL

The future of Hartley Hospital in Colne is to be debated in the House of Commons next Thursday. The hospital which was gifted to the people of Colne by the Hartley family, made famous by their jams, has been empty and boarded up for the past six years while the owners - the North West Regional Health Authority - decides what to do about it.

The Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, made a successful bid for the prized slot in next week's Commons timetable. A Government Minister will be on hand to reply to the debate.

The MP said: "This debate will give me the opportunity to put on the record what thousands of people in Colne feel very deeply. It is their hospital and they don't want to lose it. I am not prepared to see it slowly crumble and decay while the Regional Health Authority dithers about what to do with this beautiful hospital set in attractive grounds."

For Immediate Release: 10 March 1994
77/94

PRENTICE CLASHES WITH MINISTERS OVER "DOLE IN PRISON" REVELATIONS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily with Home Office Ministers in the Commons over revelations in The Times today that some prisoners are getting unemployment benefit and other benefits paid to them while in prison. The MP was concerned that the cash could help finance drug dealing behind prison walls.

The MP told the Commons there was an "easy availability of drugs in prisons" - a fact confirmed by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Stephen Tumin, who recently expressed deep concern about the situation in the privatised Wolds prison.

Prentice said Ministers had known for six years that prisoners had been getting dole payments and, incredibly, they had done nothing about it. The MP said the behaviour of Ministers was an absolute disgrace.

Turning on the Home Office number two, David Maclean, the Pendle MP said he was "all mouth and no action".

Note to Editors: Latest figures from the Home Office show that Drug Trafficking offences in Lancashire have gone up six fold since 1988. In 1988 there were 20 such offences recorded in the County; 51 in 1989; 91 in 1990; 104 in 1991 and 118 in 1992 - the latest year for which figures are available.

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
78/94

ROLLS ROYCE UNIONS PRESS FOR COMMITMENT ON AEROSPACE

Shop stewards from the Rolls Royce plant at Barnoldswick will be meeting local MP, Gordon Prentice, at Westminster this week to get his backing for the 19 key recommendations from the Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee designed to secure the future of the industry.

The unions want the Government to increase aid to aerospace and give more energetic backing to aerospace companies. They also want the Government to do more work on defence conversion.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I am deeply concerned about the future of the country's aerospace industry and the implications for the North West of the continuing contraction. It is not just a loss of jobs we should be worried about but also the erosion of the region's reservoir of skills. In the decade 1981 - 1991 our leading high tech industry, aerospace, has lost 37,600 jobs. Since 1979, the Government has given £458.4 million to Rolls Royce in "launch aid" for new projects - but it all has to be paid back. Backing comes by way of loan, not by way of grant. Companies such as Rolls Royce operating at the leading edge of the new technologies deserve every possible support from the Government."

Note to Editors: In 1981, the aerospace industry employed 185,000 people. In 1984, 164,700; 1987, 158,200; 1989, 163,400 and in 1991, 147,400.

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
79/94

KEEP BRITISH SUMMERTIME says PENDLE MP

Continuing uncertainty over Government proposals to scrap British Summertime and move over to Central European Time have been blasted by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says any change will plunge half the country into darkness in mid morning.

Last October, the Pendle MP voted against a 10 Minute Rule Bill introduced by Conservative MP, Nigel Waterson, to change to Central European Time which would reduce daylight hours in the morning. Since then, there has been press

speculation (most notably in the Scotsman on January 10) suggesting the Government hopes to bring forward legislation changing to CET before the summer.

The MP commented: "This is a hare brained proposal which should, quite literally, never see the light of day. Apparently the European Commission is applying pressure on us to introduce Central European Time but with what benefits to Britain? None. Daylight will break in some parts of Scotland at 11am and between 9am and 10am in many other parts of the country."

"If this goes through it will adversely affect millions of people. Postal workers will be fumbling around with flashlights struggling to read addresses on letters. And what about farm workers, building workers and delivery people who will be expected to work in darkness? However, I am most concerned about school children who may be forced to travel to school in darkness. It doesn't bear thinking about."

"The main group of people to benefit will be criminals, lurking about in the shadows."

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
80/94

GOVERNMENT "OUT OF STEP WITH EUROPE" ON SEX EQUALITY says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused the Government of being out of step with women and out of step with Europe when it comes to sex equality. The MP was challenging the myth that equality for women was incompatible with economic recovery.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "Under this Government the UK has had more European judgements made against it for failing to abide by the five equality directives than any other member state.# The UK is bottom of the European childcare league and one of the few European Union countries not to provide for parental leave. We are also bottom of the European maternity pay league. It is an appalling check-list of discrimination against more than 50% of the population."

Prentice added: "There are at least six million women working for poverty pay in Britain. And women lose around £20 billion as a result of sex bias in the labour market. Women are getting a raw deal under this Government."

ends

Note to Editors: #The five directives are the Equal Pay Directive 1975, Equal Treatment Directive 1976, Social Security Directives of 1978 and 1984 and the latest ruling on part-timers.

Only 2% of under threes have publicly funded childcare provision in the UK compared with 50% in Denmark. A recent survey found that two thirds of mothers now required childcare arrangements as opposed to 50% in 1980 (reported on Department of Employment Gazette, August 1993)

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994

81/94

RURAL WAGES THREATENED says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called on the Government to abandon its plans to scrap the Agricultural Wages Boards.

Prentice said: "It is a disgrace that this Government is contemplating abolishing the Wages Councils knowing full well that this will create even greater poverty amongst farmworkers and their families. Farm workers are now among the most highly skilled workers in the land yet their hourly wages are 30% below the industrial average."

"Abolishing the Wages Boards will do untold damage to already fragile rural economies. The Agricultural Wages Boards have the support of all sides of the farming industry and the rural population. The vast majority of framers and their unions want the boards to continue. The farmers I speak to do not want a minority in their midst to pay starvation wages."

"The Minister of Agriculture, Gillian Shepherd, has said she hopes to announce the fate of the Board before Easter. It was Mrs Shepherd, when Secretary of State for Employment, who was responsible for scrapping the other Wages Councils. She will meet massive opposition if she attempts to do the same to the Agricultural Wages Board."

For Immediate Release: 14 March 1994
82/94

CUTS IN FUNDING FOR ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES WORSE THAN EXPECTED says PENDLE MP

Lancashire has seen a cut of over 22% in the amount of money it gets from central government to help teach children whose first language is not English. The grant (known as Section 11 funding) to the County has plummeted from £5,450,000 in 1993/4 to £4,250,000 in 1994/5. The grant was earmarked to help the 30,089 youngsters age 17 and under whose first language is not English. They represent 9% of the total in Lancashire.

Last October, anxious teachers and parents from Pendle lobbied the local MP, Gordon Prentice, at Westminster to press the Government to rethink its policy of cutting funds for ethnic minority communities.

Prentice commented: "These cuts are in line with what we expected but in some areas the reductions are even worse. Places such as Bradford and Dudley face cuts of over 30%. The Government's policy is dangerously short sighted."

ends

Note to Editors: Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 has been an important source of funding of special educational needs, such as language support, for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. In April 1992, the Home Office agreed to fund projects under this scheme in conjunction with the local authorities. The agreement was on the basis of the Home Office

funding 75% of the cost of the projects and the local education authority funding 25% and contracts were entered into and projects started.

Last October Prentice said: "Instead of carrying through the agreement, the Government has reneged on it without warning - despite the fact that contracts had been agreed and projects started. The Home Office contribution is to go down to 57% and then to 50% leaving local authorities to make up the difference." Last year, the Pendle MP sought clarification of the Government's position on S11 and received the following reply from Peter Lloyd MP on 24 May 1993:

Funding for Ethnic Minority Communities

Thank you for your letter of 6 May to Kenneth Clarke seeking clarification about funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. I am replying as the Minister with primary responsibility for this grant.

I should like to emphasise at once that we remain firmly committed to tackling the causes of disadvantage - lack of English being a prime example - which inhibits members o~ ethnic minorities from playing a full part in the social and economic life of the country. We are also very appreciative of the valuable work which has been, and continues to be, carried out by teachers and other staff supported by section 11 grant.

In the light of the above, I hope that you will assure your constituents that it was with much regret that, faced with the general economic situation and the consequential pressures on public expenditure programmes, we were driven to conclude that we would be unable to sustain throughout the next three years the level of expenditure on section 11 grant which we would have wished and which we had earlier planned. As you will appreciate, the economic situation has changed markedly since applications for section 11 funding were invited, and since decisions were taken about the approval of projects and the allocation of grant.

I am glad to say that, despite the severe pressures to which I referred, it has been possible to secure provision for 1993/94 which should be sufficient to enable us to continue to support existing projects at the current level of grant. Unfortunately, overall pressures in the two subsequent years are such that I am afraid that it will be necessary, on the basis of current planning assumptions, to reduce the rate of grant to around 57% in 1994/95 and to around 50% in 1995/96.

I realise how disappointing all of this is both to local authorities, their staff and others such as school governors, and to the communities whom the grant is designed to benefit. I wish that it had not been necessary to reach such unwelcome decisions. As soon as the funding position became clear, I was anxious that authorities and others should be put in the picture at the earliest opportunity, in the hope that the 16 months' notice, which it was possible to give before a reduction in the rate of grant would need to take effect, would be helpful to them in considering adjustment to their own financial planning. However, I certainly do not underestimate the difficulties which face authorities.

Despite the decisions which it has been necessary to take, the section 11 programme remains substantial - on present figures, around £97 million in

1995/96. I have also been anxious that we should work closely with authorities and other interested parties in order to ensure that the available funding achieves maximum benefit for members of ethnic minorities. To this end, we invited them to let us have their observations by the end of March about possible options for administration of the available funding. We are currently considering.the responses. I can assure you of my determination that the available funding should be used as fully and effectively as possible.
PETER LLOYD

For Immediate Release: 16 March 1994
83/94

MP SLAMS "DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT" IN EAST LANCS TRAINING COUNCIL

East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council is running scared of having elected representatives of local people on its board according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP raised the issue with Employment Ministers in the Commons yesterday, arguing the Government should take responsibility for the "mushrooming number of quangoes and the anti-democratic culture they spawn".

Prentice said: "The Training and Enterprise Councils are supposed to be spearheading the nation's training effort, spending millions of pounds every year in the process. ELTEC has a budget twice as large as my own Borough Council. They should be much more accountable in how they spend and manage public money."

The MP urged Employment Minister, Ann Widdecombe, to join him in "unreservedly condemning ELTEC's decision to exclude any elected representatives from the district councils". The MP went on: "The Board would only accept an unelected representative, the Chief Executive of Hyndburn who has many excellent qualities but being elected is not one of them. Why should my TEC, or indeed any TEC, be running scared of people who are elected?"

Prentice said afterwards: "The answer I received from the Minister was entirely predictable. She told me the Leader of Lancashire County Council was on the Board - something I am obviously well aware of. But why should experienced and knowledgeable people holding positions of responsibility in the local councils in the area be systematically excluded? They don't have two heads. There is simply no good reason at all."

The MP will be meeting Tony Cann, the Chair of ELTEC on Friday to discuss this and other training issues.

or Immediate Release: 16 March 1994
84/94

MPs CLASH IN CAR BOOT SALES ROW

A furious clash between Pendle's Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, and his Tory next door neighbour, Ribble Valley's Nigel Evans, about car boot sales engulfed the committee stage of the Deregulation Bill yesterday. Both MPs are members

of this key Committee which, the Government says, is looking at ways to cut red tape without cutting back on protection of the public.

The Pendle MP said: "In my excellent regional daily, the Lancashire Evening Telegraph, I am constantly reading about the legislative heroics of Ribble Valley's Tory MP yet the tidal waves promised to his constituents end up as insignificant ripples by the time they reach the House of Commons."

"Almost a year ago he promised early action to curb car boot sales in his constituency on the grounds that they caused aggravation to residents, restricted access for emergency vehicles, were venues for the sale of stolen and counterfeit goods and, in a word, were not regulated by the authorities. I have a sheaf full of press cutting in which he tells us action is imminent yet the fact is, it is all illusory. Nothing has happened and nothing will happen in the near future."

"We are both serving on a Bill which has as its main purpose deregulation - and, indeed, the deregulation of markets. Yet what we should be discussing is a comprehensive Bill to update the entire law of markets, taking into account the recent growth in, for example, car boot sales. People are being ripped off right, left and centre and they are being sold goods which are sometimes dangerous and sometimes stolen. These markets need to be properly regulated but the Government is turning a blind eye."

"It's not on for MPs to promise one thing in their constituency and do precisely the opposite at Westminster."

For Immediate Release: 16 March 1994
85/94

MPs TO SEEK MEETING WITH ROLLS ROYCE AND HESELTINE OVER CRISIS IN AEROSPACE

Workers at Rolls Royce have won the backing of MPs in their drive to secure increased Government support for the aerospace industry which many fear will go the same way as the British motor car industry, with ownership eventually transferring overseas. Representatives of the Rolls Royce unions urged early action on the recommendations of last year's report on aerospace from the Commons Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, was one of over twenty Labour MPs who today met the union reps - including three from the plant at Barnoldswick - at the House of Commons.

The MP told the meeting the Government's response to the closely argued and persuasive Select Committee report was "pathetic". "The Government is closing its eyes to the massive changes that are happening in aerospace and they are not offering enough in the way of practical help. I want to see an early debate on the industry and an early meeting the the Company. I also want a meeting with the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, who used to promise that he would *"intervene before breakfast, before lunch and before dinner"*. He is about to publish a White Paper on Competitiveness and I want to know what he has to say about aerospace - or if, as I suspect, it is ignored entirely."

or Immediate Release: 17 March 1994
86/94

PENDLE JOBLESS HOVERS UNDER 3,000

Last month, 2,922 people in Pendle were out of work and claiming benefit. Of these, 2,283 were men and 639 women. The February figure is 46 down on January and represents 7.8% of the workforce.

There were 74 vacancies at the Job Centre in Colne - down from 115 in January. In Nelson, the figures were static with 136 vacancies in January and 135 in February.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "No-one is fooled by the statistics any more. They are rapidly ceasing to mean anything at all. We know they have been recalculated, recalibrated, massaged and manipulated with one aim in mind - to get the jobless totals down."

"We also know that Pendle, and, indeed, the country at large, is losing skilled, full time jobs and these are being replaced by low paid, low skill and part time jobs."

"We have now reached the stage where the official unemployment figures conceal more than they reveal. Just like this Government."

PENDLE JOB WATCH: Jobless totals since John Major became PM
from Gordon Prentice MP

Unemployed	Date	Rate
1708	Nov-90	4.5
2037	Dec-90	5.3
2199	Jan-91	5.7
2286	Feb-91	5.9
2467	Mar-91	6.4
2494	Apr-91	6.5
2548	May-91	6.6
2608	Jun-91	6.8
2752	Jul-91	7.1
2815	Aug-91	7.3
2762	Sep-91	7.2
2651	Oct-91	6.9
2610	Nov-91	6.8
2684	Dec-91	7
3001	Jan-92	7.8
2958	Feb-92	7.7
2948	Mar-92	7.6
3020	Apr-92	7.8
3064	May-92	7.9
3015	Jun-92	7.8
3274	Jul-92	8.5
3355	Aug-92	8.7
3216	Sep-92	8.3
2950	Oct-92	7.6

Colne	Vacancies	Nelson
114	Oct-92	368

2822	Nov-92	7.3	110	Nov-92	236
3006	Dec-92	7.8	102	Dec-92	166
3161	Jan-93	8.2	49	Jan-93	160
3031	Feb-93	7.9	91	Feb-93	150
3025	Mar-93	7.8	93	Mar-93	128
2972	Apr-93		87	Apr-93	158
		*7.9			
2861	May-93	7.6	110	May-93	160
2928	Jun-93	7.8	113	Jun-93	176
3234	Jul-93	8.6	99	Jul-93	142
3237	Aug-93	8.6	121	Aug-93	155
3065	Sep-93	8.1	99	Sep-93	196
2783	Oct-93	7.4	124	Oct-93	349
2719	Nov-93	7.2	105	Nov-93	261
2772	Dec-93	7.4	96	Dec-93	153
2968	Jan-94	7.9	115	Jan-94	136
2922	Feb-94	7.8	74	Feb-94	135

*change in method of calculating working population

or Immediate Release: 21 March 1994
88/94

MP CALCULATES COST OF CONSERVATIVES

The Conservative Government is costing the nation a fortune according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP told a meeting of Labour's backbench Treasury Committee this week that public spending is to be cut in real terms by £3,300 million - or 1.3% - between this year and next.

Prentice said: "It's another broken promise to add to the list. On 30 March 1992, the Prime Minister said: *"If we were going to cut public expenditure we would have done so before (the election) and I don't believe it is economically right. So you can rule out any expectation of that.*"

"Just when the economy needs investment to sustain the recovery and create jobs, the Government is cutting back. They are cutting public sector investment by £2.3 billion (8%) over the next three years and that is £250 million lower each year than they announced even in the last Budget. The Tories have already cut public sector investment by £6.6 billion (18%) in real terms since 1989/90. Support for investment in the private sector fares little better. Support for key technologies in, for example, aerospace has been lamentable. We need to get the message across that investment mean jobs, now and in the future. Astonishingly, Government investment in training will be cut by £119 million next year (5.1%) after cuts of £400 million since 1990/1."

"The plain fact is that the Government makes cuts in the wrong things to spend on the wrong things. They make cuts in housing investment while they spend more on economic failure. They are cutting £300m from housing associations' approved development programme when houses are desperately needed. Yet they allow £1.7 billion to clock up in uncollected taxes - and that's just in one year."

more follows

Cost of Conservatives

Note to Editors: Conservative mismanagement of the economy has meant falling tax receipts and a rising unemployment bill. The Government won't tackle the economic causes of a high PSBR, they just make crisis cuts in public spending instead. This is the Government which thought unemployment was a price worth paying. Now ordinary families are paying the price of unemployment.

Unemployment now costs every family in Britain £20 a week. Every person unemployed costs the Exchequer £9,000 a year. Overall, unemployment costs the nation around £25 billion a year. That is half the total public sector deficit.

For Immediate Release: 21 March 1994
89/94

MP TELLS HEALTH CHIEFS "DON'T SELL HARTLEY HOSPITAL"

The MP at the centre of the controversy over the sale of the Hartley Hospital in Colne has told regional health chiefs not to sell the site to the Simonstone based builders who want to build luxury flats on the site. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today formally requested the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority to put a stop on the sale pending a full review of the planning issues he detailed in last week's Commons debate.

The MP told Sir Bruce: "Hartley Hospital is in designated green belt land and, as such, any redevelopment is covered by circulars issued by the Department of the Environment on the use of redundant hospital sites. This would seem to rule out any redevelopment for housing purposes if there is another acceptable use as, indeed, there is. The position is reinforced by Pendle Borough Council's own planning policies for the site."

The MP also asked Sir Bruce if the purchasers were made fully aware of the planning constraints on the development of the site.

Prentice said: "The issues raised by me in the Commons have not be satisfactorily answered by the Health Minister and I want a full and thorough review of the entire matter. And I want the sale to the builders stopped. The sale cuts across Government policy on the use of redundant hospitals in the Green Belt and it runs directly counter to the planning policies of the local planning authority - Pendle Borough Council. The Department of Health's own code on the disposal of surplus NHS property has been disregarded and all this has been done in the rush to complete the sale before I could raise the issue in the House."

"Sir William Hartley would turn in his grave if he knew what was happening to the hospital he gave to the people of Colne."

For Immediate Release: 21 March 1994
90/94

PENDLE MP SLAMS NEW CRIMINAL INJURY RULES

Future loss of earnings and future costs of medical care are to be excluded completely from damages assessed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board even when in the case of badly injured people they are often the most important losses.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, speaking at Westminster today said the new rules were outrageous. "They will lead to some ludicrous unfairness in the compensation awarded. For example, under the new scheme a victim of child abuse - below the level of rape - will receive only £1,000, the same amount as for a chipped tooth. A police officer who was seriously injured in a criminal attack was awarded £121,000 last year under the existing scheme but would be entitled to only £7,500 under the new scheme. What a lunatic state of affairs!"

"The Government's record on crime simply doesn't bear scrutiny. The risk of burglary has risen from one in 32 homes in 1979 to one in 12 now. In my constituency, as in many others, we have had immense problems with young burglars who offend, are sentenced and abscond because there's nowhere secure to put them. Yet this is the same Government that in February 1991 pledged 65 secure places for juvenile offenders and not a single one has been built."

"The 1992 Conservative Manifesto (page 22) promised "There will be 1,000 extra police officers this year" but instead the number of police officers has been cut by 224. The Conservative Manifesto is a work of fiction rivalling the imaginings of Tolkein."

For Immediate Release: 22 March 1994
91/94

COUNTY COUNCIL QUIZZED OVER PLANS TO CLOSE OLD FOLKS HOME

County Council proposals to close Andrew Smith House - a residential care home for the elderly in Nelson's Marsden Hall Road - have been criticised by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says he has been left completely in the dark about the council's intentions. There is to be a meeting at the home on Friday between county council officials and residents and relatives.

Prentice said: "I found out about the proposal last week - but not from the County Council. And at my weekend surgeries I had a stream of people with relatives at Andrew Smith House come to see me expressing their disbelief that a closure could be on the cards."

"I wrote to the Leader of the County Council on Wednesday of last week and I followed it up with another letter to the County Chief Executive asking for full details. Why is the closure thought to be necessary? Why this home? What arrangements are being proposed for the residents, many of whom are very frail and confused? What contact was made with the Borough Council? And why was there no information given beforehand to me, as Pendle's Member of Parliament?"

"The way this is being handled by the County Council is quite appalling."

For Immediate Release: 23 March 1994
92/94

MP AIMS TO BREAK LOG-JAM OVER BY-PASSES

Government studies show that the opening of the link from the M65 to the M6 could increase traffic on the M65 east of Blackburn by around 11%. There could be between 9,000 and 11,000 vehicles per day on the A56 east of Colne in 1997.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "These new figures add urgency to our efforts to get the by-passes at Colne-Foulridge and Kelbrook-Earby built while we're still on this earth to see it. So far as I am concerned, the Government has made a definitive statement on the eastwards extension of the M65 - it isn't going to happen. This means we need to roll up our sleeves and get the by-passes under way before we all choke under the weight of traffic that is going to disgorge into Colne when the M65-M6 link is completed."

'Everyone in Pendle knows what the problem is and no-one gains anything by point scoring. I shall be pressing Ministers here at Westminster to work with the County Council and Pendle Borough Council to get the new by-passes under way as soon as humanly possible."

"I know the County Council has suggested to the Department of Transport possible changes to the trunk road network east of the M6 which could lead to the detrunking of the A59 between the A677 at the Trafalgar Hotel and the A56 at Broughton, west of Skipton. The County proposes instead that the county length of the M65 would become a trunk road together with the A56 from Colne to Broughton - and, if this were to happen, the road improvements such as the Colne-Foulridge and Kelbrook-Earby by-passes should be financed by the Department of Transport."

"Clearly, there is a stand off between the Department of Transport and the County Council and we in Pendle are piggy in
the middle. Now that work has begun on the M65-M6 link, it is absolutely essential that we sort things out. If nothing happens, my constituents who live alongside the A56 will, quite literally, be driven round the bend by all the increased traffic."

For Immediate Release: 23 March 1994
93/94

PENDLE MP URGES GOVERNMENT TO ACT ON NEW INFORMATION ON KILLING OF PAUL GOODALL

One of the murderers of Mr Paul Goodall, the humanitarian aid worker who was brutally slain in Bosnia on 28 January, is being held in jail in Zenica in central Bosnia according to reports in *The* Guardian today.

The revelations have prompted Mr Goodall's constituency MP, Gordon Prentice, to seek assurances from the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, that the man named by *The* Guardian is brought to trial for his alleged participation in the murder.

Prentice said: "The local police in Zenica maintain the matter is closed as the three killers of Mr Goodall were themselves gunned down by the authorities. Yet we now have this news today that links a Saudi Arabian, Abdul Hadi al Gahtani, with the murder. He is the registered owner of a Volkswagen Golf car that was used by five men to hijack the jeep that Mr Goodall and his wounded colleagues, David Court and Simon King, were driving. Mr Court and Mr King identified al Gahtani as one of those present at the time of the slaying."

"I want a full report from the Foreign Secretary on this."

Note to Editors: Last January the Pendle MP tabled the following Early Day Motion: "That this House pays tribute to Mr Paul Goodall of Earby, Lancashire who was murdered in Bosnia on Friday 28 January 1994 while engaged in providing humanitarian relief for the victims of the conflict; salutes the courage of Mr Goodall and his colleagues David Court and Simon King who were wounded in the attack and sends its condolences to his widow, Denise, and their four young daughters in their tragic bereavement."

or Immediate Release: 23 March 1994
94/94

MP PRESSES DEMAND FOR A MORE REPRESENTATIVE MAGISTRATES BENCH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who provoked controversy last week when he called for a "re-balancing" of the Bench, is calling on the Lord Chancellor to collect information centrally on the political affiliations of magistrates. He expressed disbelief that this information could "only be supplied at disproportionate cost". *(See Hansard 17 March 1994. Col 758)* The MP says he is determined to see the magistrates bench broadly reflect the community it serves.

Prentice said: "It has been suggested that I am trying to involve the judiciary in politics but this is pure nonsense. I want to see a Bench that is representative of the area it serves and from an analysis carried out by my colleague, Stephen Byres MP, there is an overwhelming Tory bias that, over time, needs to be corrected. No-one to my knowledge has challenged the Byres analysis of 17 areas in England and Wales (including Pendle) picked at random."

"The Lord Chancellor tells me it is established policy (see below) to make the Bench broadly reflect the local community but he refuses to analyse the political affiliations of the Bench as currently constituted to see whether his policy is being followed. If it is too expensive to do a trawl through the existing Bench - and this is something I dispute - I want to see a start made now on collecting information about new appointees. I also want to see positive efforts made to demystify the Bench so that applicants can be encouraged to come forward from all walks of life."

ends

Note to Editors: The following Parliamentary Question tabled by Gordon Prentice MP was answered today (23 March)

QUESTION: MR GORDON PRENTICE (PENDLE): To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what steps he is taking to ensure the political affiliations of the magistrates bench more closely reflect the views of the population in the areas in which they sit. (more follows)

Magistrates

ANSWER: MR JOHN TAYLOR: The Lord Chancellor, with his Advisory Committees, seeks to encourage applications from suitable people of all walks of life and political affiliations through press notices and posters and leaflets and contact with employers and other organisations. Appointments are made from those considered to be suitable having proper regard to the various balancing factors such as age, gender and political affiliation so that each bench broadly reflects the community it serves. Appointments can, however, only be made from those who put themselves forward for consideration. (My underlining for emphasis.)

For Immediate Release: 25 March 1994
95/94

BENETTON BACKS DOWN ON "LOATHSOME" ADVERTISEMENT

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, hailed the news today that Italian based fashion chain Benetton has decided to withdraw the controversial advertisement featuring the bullet riddled, blood spattered clothing of Marinko Gagro, the Croatian soldier murdered in July of last year.

Prentice said: "This advertisement, which I described in the House of Commons as "sick and loathsome", crossed the boundary between what is acceptable and unacceptable even from Benetton who have a history of advertisements designed to shock. I had an enormous post-bag from constituents who are still coming to terms with the murder of Earby man, Paul Goodall, the humanitarian aid worker brutally slain on 28 January this year."

The MP added: "As soon as I saw this sickening advertisement on the hoardings, I contacted the Advertising Standards Authority to urge them to ban the advertisement. I also wanted sight of the correspondence which passed between Benetton and the ASA. Now, some three weeks later, I am relieved to see the ASA and Benetton have done the right thing."

For Immediate Release: 28 March 1994
96/94

MP SENDS MESSAGE TO POST OFFICE

The Post Office should abandon plans to close Pendle's last surviving Crown Post Office at Nelson according to the area's local MP, Gordon Prentice.

At the weekend, the MP told a public meeting in Nelson - called by the Union of Communications Workers to protest about the closure plans - that the Crown Post Office had to be saved. He was joined on the platform by Mark Hendrick, Labour's Euro candidate for Lancashire Central.

Prentice told the meeting: "Crown Post Offices have been disappearing faster than a pack of cards in a Paul Daniel's Magic Show. From 1,499 in the UK in 1988 we are now down to about 830 and the Government is planning to get shot of the lot with cut price franchise operators struggling - and failing - to deliver the excellent service we have come to expect."

"The Government has been dithering for the last twenty months over Post Office privatisation, totally unable to make up its mind and blaming the "complexities" of the issue. What on earth is to happen to the Royal Mail, Parcelforce and Post Office Counters?"

Mark Hendrick added: "The Post Office should stay in the public sector where it is successful and highly regarded by the public. 91.6% of first class mail is delivered the following day compared with 74.5% as recently as 1988/9. The Post Office has made a profit in each of the last 18 years and has contributed £1.26 billion to the Exchequer over this period. To hand this efficient organisation over to the private sector, lock, stock and barrel so that the public can be ripped off mercilessly in future years would be a disgrace. It wasn't even in the Tory manifesto."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP will be a addressing a lobby of Post Office workers at Westminster this Wednesday (30 March)

For Immediate Release: 28 March 1994
97/94

POLICE HELP "FOUR MINUTES AWAY" IN COLNE

News that an emergency call in Colne will get the Police on the scene in four minutes has produced a sigh of relief from local MP, Gordon Prentice. He has been pressing the Home Secretary for detailed figures after anxious residents had lobbied him about the rise in crime.

The MP said: "This is reassuring news as is the fact that 86% of 999 calls in Lancashire are answered within 10 seconds. But set alongside these figures are the depressing ones that show a country in the grip of a crime-wave. Crime has more than doubled since 1979 and only one in 50 crimes results in a conviction."

"These figures must be viewed against a background of falling police numbers in Lancashire. In December last year there were 3,140 police officers in the county compared with 3,205 in December 1991 - a reduction of 65. These are real officers on the ground as opposed to the "authorised establishment" figures which have gone up by a paltry four (4) over the same period from 3,225 to 3,229.

"In the North West since 1987, burglaries have increased by 12% and people in the region are now paying 18% more for their home contents insurance. Over the same period, car thefts in the North West have shot up 22% and car insurance costs are up by 27%."

The MP observed: "Everyone now knows a victim of crime. Just over a year ago my constituency office at 33 Carr Road, Nelson was broken into and last week

another attempt was made to get in but sophisticated security measures saw off the thieves."

"People shouldn't have to turn their homes into the domestic equivalent of Fort Knox just to feel safe. We need to come down hard on crime - and on the causes of crime."

or Immediate Release: 28 March 1994
98/94

GOVERNMENT CASH TO BOURNEMOUTH SHORT CHANGES PENDLE says MP

New figures ferreted out by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show the South coast retirement haven of Bournemouth is getting £93.58p a head more from central government than recession hit Pendle.

The new statistics have infuriated the MP who caused a storm last month when he demanded changes to the way in which cash from central government is distributed to local authorities. He discovered genteel, seaside Bournemouth came 40th in the list of most deprived areas in the country and Pendle 92nd (where 1 is most deprived).

The MP fumed: "The total amount of central government financial support to Pendle works out at £199.46p per person compared with £293.04p in Bournemouth. In Bath - a place I've never thought of as particularly deprived - the Council there gets £256.10p per head. What we need is a thorough root and branch review of the system for allocating cash to local authorities. It is patently obvious the present system is seriously flawed."

Note to Editors: The information is derived from a Parliamentary Answer to a question tabled by the Pendle MP. In terms of revenue grants (that is the Revenue Support Grant, Specific and Special Grants with redistributed non domestic rates excluded) the Government estimates that Pendle (pop 85,600) will receive £11,508,000 for 1993/4; Bath (pop 83,900) will receive £14,004,000 and Bournemouth (pop 159,200) will get £39,768,000. This works out at £134, £166, and £249 respectively per head. On Housing Subsidies Pendle receives £3,996,000, Bath £6,589,000 and Bournemouth £6,278,000. This works out at £46 per head for Pendle, £78 for Bath and £39 for Bournemouth. Only in the area of Capital Grants is Pendle ahead. The Council gets £1,570,000 compared with Bath's £894,000 and Bournemouth's £606,000. (See earlier Press Release 35/94 of 7 February)

For Immediate Release: 30 March 1994
99/94

TRANSPORT SECRETARY PLEDGES TO LOOK AGAIN AT BY-PASS ISSUE

The Secretary of State for Transport, John MacGregor, today pledged to look again at Pendle's traffic problems following pressure from local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Transport Secretary, who was giving details of the Trunk Road Programme Review to the Commons this afternoon, was told by the Pendle MP that

completion of the M6-M65 link could mean up to 11,000 vehicles per day on the A56 east of Colne.

The MP called on the Transport Secretary to give urgent consideration to the call for by-passes between Colne and Foulridge and Kelbrook and Earby and to involve Lancashire County Council in the discussions.

The MP said afterwards: "Getting action on the by-passes is harder than rolling a boulder uphill. Colne is already choking under the weight of traffic coming off the M65 but I shudder to think what it will be like after the motorway link is complete."

"These by-passes are top priority and no-one is really fussed whether it is the County or Central Government that does the job. The important thing is to get the project moving. I hope the undertaking that John MacGregor gave me today will get the ball rolling."

For Immediate Release: 5 April 1994
100/94

PENDLE MP SLATES TORY RECORD

The Conservative record in managing the economy since they took office in 1979 has been an unmitigated disaster according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at a meeting of business people in central London today, the MP said the Conservative experiment had failed. "Whole industries have been closed down. The control of others has passed overseas and Britain's relative position in relation to our competitor countries has worsened on almost all the indices."

The MP continued: "What the Conservatives gave us was one short boom in the late eighties sandwiched between two recessions. The fact that they have won elections on such a record is a tribute to their skill in portraying fiction as fact."

"The Tories are the barrow boys of British politics - you take what they say with a pinch of salt."

ends

Note to Editors:
Background stats

Real Growth in GDP 1979 - 1993.
The UK has had the slowest growth rate of any major industrialised country.

	Average Growth Rate
United States	2.2%
Japan	3.8%
Canada	2.4%
France	2.0%
Germany	2.0%

Italy	2.1%
United Kingdom	1.7%

Employment 1980 - 1992
Whilst other economies have expanded employment, in the UK it has actually contracted. The UK has had the highest average unemployment rate of any major industrialised country.

	Average Employment Growth	Average Unemployment
United States	1.5%	7.0%
Japan	1.2%	2.4%
Canada	1.1%	9.4%
France	0.1%	9.1%
Germany	0.5%	5.6%
Italy	0.5%	9.7%
United Kingdom	-0.1%	9.7%

Inflation and Interest Rates 1980 - 1992
Inflation and interest rates have been higher on average than those in most other major industrialised countries.

	Inflation	Interest Rates
United States	5.2%	8.0%
Japan	2.6%	6.4%
Canada	5.9%	11.1%
France	6.4%	10.8%
Germany	3.0%	7.3%
Italy	10.0%	14.9%
United Kingdom	7.0%	12.0%

Manufacturing 1980 - 1991
The UK has experienced a low rate of manufacturing output which has led to the highest rate of manufacturing job loss.

	Output Growth	Annual Rate of Job Loss/Creation
United States	2.5%	0.9% lost
Japan	5.8%	1.1% created
Canada	1.1%	1.1% lost
France	0.8%	1.7% lost
Germany	1.4%	stable
Italy	2.2%	1.6% lost
United Kingdom	1.2%	3.5% lost

Exports 1980 - 1992
The UK has had the lowest rate of export growth of any major industrialised country.

	Export Growth
United States	4.9%
Japan	5.2%
Canada	5.6%
France	3.8%
Germany	4.6%
Italy	3.5%
United Kingdom	3.1%

Skills (1991)
The UK has the lowest level of skills of any major industrial country as measured by the World Economic Forum.

	Skills Index
United States	6.1
Japan	5.7
Canada	5.6
France	5.6
Germany	5.9
Italy	5.6
United Kingdom	5.2

Public Finances 1980 - 1992
The Tories claim to be the party of sound public finances. But mismanagement of the economy has seen public borrowing - particularly for recurrent day to day spending rather than for capital spending and investment in, for example, the infrastructure.

	Net Public Debt as % of GDP	Surplus of spending over revenue as % of GDP
United States	28%	2.7%
Japan	19%	0.6%
Canada	33%	4.8%
France	23%	2.2%
Germany	21%	2.2%
Italy	84%	10.8%
United Kingdom	40%	2.4%

For Immediate Release: 5 April 1994
101/94

PRENTICE POSES £64,000 QUESTION

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is asking the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Pendle people get more than £64,000 a year. The MP claims they are the only ones who now pay less tax than in 1979.

“April is the start of the new tax year and everyone will be in for a shock after a glance at their pay slip. Amazingly, families with one earner who earn less than £64,000 a year now pay more tax than when the Tories came to office."

"People are now counting the cost of all the hidden taxes. This year the Government is increasing prescription charges by five times the rate of inflation. Unemployment is now almost three times the level in 1979 and it costs every tax payer £20 a week. The Tories have so mismanaged the economy they are expecting everyone to pay the price for their failure. The tax burden we are carrying is the heaviest ever.”

The MP also took a side-swipe at the Liberal Democrats: “The only policy they were known for at the last election was the one promising to put a penny on income tax to fund education. Now they have ditched that pledge saying the penny will come from the existing tax burden.”

Note to Editors: Before the election the Conservatives promised year-on-year tax cuts. This month, Kenneth Clarke MP is giving Britain the biggest tax hike in the nation’s history.

The Chancellor’s cavalier approach to these tax increases makes matters worse:

• On Sunday 27th March he told us that the tax increases were equivalent to only three pints of beer - £5.75p. He got his figures by including non tax payers. On Monday 28 March, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Michael Portillo, admitted that the labour Opposition’s figures were correct.

• The Conservative election manifesto pledged: “We will maintain Mortgage Tax Relief.” Yet the Chancellor has cut Mortgage Tax Relief to 15%. After his Budget he told journalists “Luckily we didn’t say at what rate.” Reported in The Guardian on 2nd December 1993)

National Insurance Contributions have gone up. A penny increase in national insurance tax takes more from the average pay packet than a penny increase in income tax. national insurance is payable on earnings of just £57 a week. A married person who is the main earner doesn’t pay income tax until he or she earns £100 a week. Benefits are also being cut.

In the first full year of Kenneth Clarke’s hidden taxes the typical family will pay £500 more in tax. Next year (from April 1995) a typical family will pay £800 more in tax.

Total Increase in Tax for this year.

Gross Earnings:	Single Person:	Married Couple both working:	Married Couple two children:
Annual	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly
£5,200	£3.04	£2.14	£2.00
£7,800	£4.36	£3.33	£5.16
£10,400	£5.91	£5.82	£6.90
£13,000	£7.46	£8.40	£8.51
£15,600	£9.02	£10.02	£10.12
£18,200	£10.57	£11.42	£11.73
£20,800	£12.12	£12.98	£13.34
£23,400	£12.97	£14.55	£14.25
£26,000	£14.00	£16.11	£15.34

£28,600	£17.66	£17.67	£19.91
£31,200	£18.87	£19.23	£24.46

Source: Official Treasury answers to Parliamentary Questions.

For Immediate Release: 5 April 1994
102/94

MP OPENS LANCASHIRE CRIME FILE

An MP worried by the rising tide of crime in the County is opening a crime file in a bid to force the Government to take crime seriously.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency office in Nelson was burgled 15 months ago followed by a second unsuccessful attempt last week, is pressing for action to give the police the tools they need to do the job of tracking down criminals and bringing them to book. "The gap between what the Government says is happening and what is actually happening on the ground is getting wider and wider. We need to chart the Government's record and point out the difference between the rhetoric and the reality."

"In December last year there were 3,140 police officers in the county compared with 3,205 in December 1991 - a reduction of 65. These are real officers on the ground as opposed to the "authorised establishment" figures which have gone up by a paltry four (4) over the same period from 3,225 to 3,229."

"Even using the "authorised establishment" figures which we know overstate police strength, the rise in crime is deeply worrying. In Lancashire there are now 42.72 recorded crimes per police officer; 1.29 violent crimes per officer; 11.76 car break-ins per officer and 9.4 burglaries per officer."

ends

Note to Editors: Lancashire's population is 1,395,314 and the police establishment is 3,229 - an increase of 3.6% since 1979. Actual police numbers are as shown above.

Table follows overleaf

Lancashire Crime File

	1979	1989	Year ending June 93	% increase since 79	% increase since 89	Incidents per 100,000 pop at June 93

Violence against the person	1995	2843	3171	59	12	227
Sexual Offences	541	683	405	-25	-41	29
Robbery	118	240	590	400	146	42
Total Violent Crime	2654	3766	4166	57	11	299
House Burglary	5476	9275	18823	244	103	1349
Other Burglary	6972	7742	11526	65	49	826
Car Theft	6619	8229	13538	105	65	970
Theft from cars	5440	14202	24430	349	72	1751
Other theft and handling	18676	21951	35060	88	60	2513
Fraud and Forgery	2512	3670	3602	43	-2	258
Criminal Damage	8497	20218	25816	204	28	1850
ALL OFFENCES	57105	89917	137957	142	53	9887

For Immediate Release: 5 April 1994
103/94

TWO THIRDS IN NORTH WEST "BADLY ADVISED" TO OPT OUT OF SERPS

Two thirds of the 566,000 people in the North West who have opted out of SERPS (State Earnings Related Pension Scheme) in favour of a personal pension are likely to have lost out says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP commented: "Figures calculated my colleague John Denham, the Labour MP for Southampton Itchen, show that 66.6% of those who have left SERPS have been wrongly advised to do so. This amounts to 377,000 people out of a total of 566,000, representing 5.9% of the working population."

"Thousands upon thousands of people have been unwittingly ripped off in the Government inspired move to coax people into personal pension schemes. Anyone earning less than £10,000 is likely to have lost out and thousands who have opted out are too old to benefit. The whole thing is absolutely scandalous. John Denham deserves a medal for all the work he has done in bringing this out into the open."

ends

Note to Editors: A strong consensus is developing that a large number of people who have opted out of Serps have been badly advised and are very likely to be worse off as a result:

- Coopers and Lybrand put the figure at 2.4 million, 40% of those who have opted out. This includes all those who are working and earn under £10,000 a year.

- John Denham estimates the figure to be 3.2 million, 60% of those who have opted out. This includes those earning under £10,000 a year plus those who have lost their jobs since taking out a private pension and so are putting nothing into their pension, but who are still paying charges and commission.

- Bryn Davis of Union Pension Services, has calculated that more than 2.5 million people will be worse off. This includes women earning less than £12,000 and men earning less than £8,000 a year, and those with no earnings. 53% of men and 71% of women should opt back into Serps according to UPS.

Anyone earning less than £10,000 is likely to have lost out, despite the Government "incentive" to take out a personal pension, because their contributions will be too low to out-perform Serps, after the pension companies have taken off their commission and charges. These average 24% of total contributions over the life of a pension.

Coopers and Lybrand also estimate that a further 85,000 people who are opted out are too old to benefit from it, whatever their earnings, because there is not enough time for their pensions to grow sufficiently before they retire. Estimates of the age after which people should be in Serps vary widely.

Private pensions are also a risky investment, compared to Serps. Calculations about the age above which, and income below which, people should stay in Serps depend on assumptions about the rate of growth of investment funds. Pension companies have been assuming growth rates of 2.5% above increases in average earnings, which looks highly optimistic.

According to Coopers and Lybrand "commission and insurer's charges (compared to providing the same benefit through the State) mean that contracting out is only likely to be of significant benefit to higher-paid people in their 20s and 30s who are prepared to take an investment risk."

For Immediate Release: 12 April 1994
104/94

MP BACKS GO-IT-ALONE PENDLE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, wants Pendle Council to be responsible for running all local services if the Government forces through its plans to abolish Lancashire County County. The MP says Pendle should stay on its present boundaries following the Government shake-up of local authorities in England.

In a letter to Sir John Banham, the Chairman of the Local Government Commission the MP backed the local council's submission which he described

as "first rate". The Commission, which is responsible for recommending the new council map in England, is currently reviewing the structure of local government in Lancashire.

Prentice said: "I am in favour of setting up a single tier of councils to replace the current county/district structure but not at any price. Any new structure must be rooted in local communities with their own distinctive identities. I am not giving this Government a blank cheque to reorganise local government as they alone see fit. Their record hardly inspires confidence. The Conservatives have been responsible for every post war reorganisation of local government and each one has been flawed. They set up the metropolitan counties and abolished them. They set up the GLC and ILEA and abolished them. They set up the present two tier structure which they are about to dismantle."

"If the Government abolishes the county councils and sets up a new single tier structure based on gigantic monster councils that no-one wants there will be uproar. The Government would be exchanging one unsatisfactory structure with another even worse one."

For Immediate Release: 12 April 1994
105/94

MP QUIZZES DISTRICT VALUER OVER HARTLEY HOSPITAL SALE

News that the North West Regional Health Authority is to press ahead with the sale of Hartley Hospital in Colne despite attempts by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to block the sale is unlikely to signal the end of the matter. The MP has pledged to do everything he can to spike the Health Authority's guns.

The Chairman of the Regional Health Authority, Sir Bruce Martin, told Prentice he saw no reason to stop the sale, brushing aside the MP's allegations that proper procedures for the disposal of surplus NHS property had not been followed.

Prentice said: "I am now in touch with the District Valuer who, apparently, gave Sir Bruce the green light to go ahead with the disposal. I want to know when he was first contacted about the sale and how he dealt with it. I may yet involve the Health Service Ombudsman but much will depend on the nature of the reply I receive from the valuer."

"The Government is worse than useless. It is determined to wash its hands of the matter completely. The hospital has been empty since 1989 and when I asked Virginia Bottomley when she last had occasion to express concern about the length of time taken to dispose of surplus NHS properties she told me the question had never arisen. It obviously doesn't bother her that this much cherished hospital has been left to moulder away for years on end."

For Immediate Release: 12 April 1994
106/94

PRENTICE IN TALKS WITH IRISH PM

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves by the Irish and British Governments to keep the momentum going in the drive to bring peace to Northern Ireland. The MP was part of a delegation from the Labour Party's back-bench Northern Ireland Committee who visited Dublin earlier this week for a series of high level discussions with Government Ministers and key policy advisers.

The MPs met the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds TD, and the Deputy Prime Minister, Dick Spring TD, and leaders of the opposition parties.

Prentice commented: "The Downing Street Declaration, which has been endorsed by both Parliaments, offers the best framework in a long time for constructing a lasting peace. A pre-condition of progress is that the IRA - and all other paramilitary groups -should end the violence. The British Government has said it has no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland and it is for the people of Ireland to decide their own future. This being the case, there is now no conceivable justification for violence and while there cannot be any change in the status of Northern Ireland without the freely given consent of the people living there, the British Government for the first time is commited actively to taking steps to build agreement."

"We in the Labour Party unequivocally condemn all violence. We want to see a united Ireland brought about by peaceful means and on the basis of consent. No group or party should be allowed to exercise a veto on political developments or on policies designed to win consent. We owe it to future generations - here as in Ireland - to work tirelessly and purposefully for a settlement that will bring peace and prosperity and safeguard people's rights."

For Immediate Release: 13 April 1994
107/94

BARROWFORD BUILDER GOES BUST

Alexander Schultz, the Barrowford builder named in a House of Commons motion last July by local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been made bankrupt by the High Court in a petition brought by the Inland Revenue. His co-habitee, Lindsay Jane Ashworth, who lives with him at their luxury home at Carr Hall Road, was also declared bankrupt - this time in a petition brought by the Customs and Excise.

Prentice said: "I first became involved last year when a stream of local tradespeople came to see me alleging they were owed considerable sums of money by Alexander Schultz, a man with a history of setting up and then folding companies. I raised the matter in the Commons and urged the President of the Board of Trade to investigate the allegations to see whether there had been any breaches of the Companies Acts or the criminal law."

"I am pleased to say that following the bankruptcy action, the official receiver is now pursuing the matter further and is investigating the conduct of Mr Schultz when he was a company director."

"Unfortunately, my constituents are all trade creditors (in that they did building and other related work on fitting out Mr Schultz's newly constructed houses) and as such come way down in the pecking order when it comes to

getting their money back. People holding a charge on property and the like, and the Inland Revenue take precedence over unsecured creditors."

"As a bankrupt, Mr Schultz will automatically be discharged after three years but in the meantime he will not be able to get any credit without disclosing his status, nor act as a company director - nor become an MP or local councillor. But if the official receiver is misled in any way in the course of his investigations into Mr Schultz's business activities,
the penalties are altogether more severe. There is a possibility of disqualification for up to 15 years."

"Over the coming months, the official receiver will be investigating Mr Schultz's conduct down to the minutest detail. He will be looking at whether there have been breaches of the Insolvency Acts and the Theft Act, which brings to bear the criminal law."

"My sole concern is to see justice done to my constituents who did work for Mr Schultz and were not paid. The fact that Mr Schultz now carries the stigma of bankruptcy is cold comfort for those who lost thousands of pounds."

ends

Note to Editors: Last July, local MP, Gordon Prentice, called on the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, to mount an investigation into the activities of Barrowford house builder and company director, Alexander Schultz. The MP's demand for action was backed by his front bench colleague, Blackburn MP, Jack Straw.

The MPs put down an early day motion in the Commons which called on Michael Heseltine to probe the business activities and track record of Mr Schultz to see whether he has breached the Companies Acts or the criminal law. The Department of Trade and Industry subsequently told the MPs it would not get involved with individual cases other than those subject to bankruptcy proceedings.

At the time, Prentice said: "I have had a stream of tradespeople come to see me about the activities of Alexander Schultz alleging they are owed thousands of pounds by this man. I have looked through bundles of documentation and heard the most distressing stories from constituents who had dealings with him and ended up losing a small fortune for work they did - but wasn't paid for. He just walked away from his debts. An urgent investigation into Alexander Schultz's business practices is required."

The Early Day Motion which appeared in the Commons Order Paper on 28 July 1993 read:

> Mr Alexander Schultz
>
> that this house, noting that Mr Alexander Schultz of 7 Apple Garth, Carr Hall, Barrowford, Nelson, Lancashire is shown in Companies House records as a director and/or shareholder of
>
> BAFTONHURST LTD,
> CHAINMASTER LTD,
> DAWSON CONTRACTORS (WALLASEY) LTD,

BROADBRIGHT LTD

Barrowford Builder goes bust

AND AMBERFINE LTD,

that each of these companies has been in serious financial difficulties, that some are now being wound up, and that for example the Auditors of the accounts of Baftonhurst Ltd reported on 9 June 1992 that the company had not maintained proper accounting records and that accordingly they had been unable to substantiate expenditure of £537,471.00 charged to the profit and loss account,

that the liquidator of Broadbright Ltd, Mr Wilson Henry, Chartered Accountant, has made serious accusations of fraud by Mr Schultz to the Department of Trade and Industry,

that a number of traders in East Lancashire claim that they are owed thousands of pounds by Mr Schultz and companies under his control, and that these persons include Mr Jack Livesey of 235 Skipton Road, Colne, Lancashire and Mr K P Hacking of 27 Arnside Crescent, Blackburn,

therefore calls upon the President of the Board of Trade to investigate Mr Schultz and the companies he has controlled, to ascertain whether there have been any breaches by him of the Companies Acts or the criminal law.

For Immediate Release: 13 April 1994
108/94

MP DEMANDS FULL DISCLOSURE ON PLANS TO CLOSE DELIVERY OFFICES

The Post Office is planning to close the delivery offices at Colne, Nelson and Barnoldswick according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP says he has been told by the Post Office that the three delivery offices are to close and *"it is proposed to relocate the delivery staff to a new purpose built site in (the) area."* The letter from Gordon Robinson, the Delivery Area Manager for the Post Office in the North West, goes on: *"There is absolutely no intention of reducing the number of deliveries serving these areas, and as far as possible, the same Postman will continue will continue to deliver mail to his existing customers. In addition, a callers facility will still be provided at (or close to) the current site to enable customers to collect any items we have been unable to deliver."*

The MP said: "This is the first official confirmation that the three delivery offices are destined for closure and this news will create a great deal of anxiety. I am told there will be full consultation with all interested parties."

"A thousand questions are waiting to be asked about this proposal. What will the effect be on local people and on the towns which will lose their familiar red painted delivery offices? What will be the impact be on our postmen and women?"

"You could count on the fingers of one hand the number of people who would be in favour of this but for the moment we don't have all the details. I am waiting for chapter and verse from the Post Office on what they are trying to

achieve by these sweeping changes. What is allegedly good for the Post Office as an organisation may be the kiss of death for a small town and its local community."

For Immediate Release: 13 April 1994
109/94

£64,000 QUESTION ANSWERED

4,000 taxpayers in Lancashire (out of a total of 601,000) get £64,000 a year or more and they are the only people in the county who pay less tax now than in 1979. According to local MP, Gordon Prentice, everyone else pays more. Across the country as a whole, 260,000 people had an income on or above that figure in 1991/2, the latest year for which information can be provided.

Prentice said: "This evidence - provided by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury - demonstrates what we already know. This Government is responsible for the highest tax burden in living memory. Only the very richest have gained. Tax has gone up because the Tories have grotesquely and ham-fistedly mismanaged the economy, putting more firms out of business every year. Here in Pendle in 1992 (the latest year for which figures are available) 254 businesses registered for VAT - but 284 de-registered. That's fairly typical of what has been happening across the country."

Note to Editors: Extracts from Press Release 101/94 of 5 April 1994 (Prentice poses £64,000 question) are reprinted below:

Before the election the Conservatives promised year-on-year tax cuts. This month, Kenneth Clarke MP is giving Britain the biggest tax hike in the nation's history.

The Chancellor's cavalier approach to these tax increases makes matters worse:

• On Sunday 27th March he told us that the tax increases were equivalent to only three pints of beer - £5.75p. He got his figures by including non tax payers. On Monday 28 March, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Michael Portillo, admitted that the labour Opposition's figures were correct.

• The Conservative election manifesto pledged: "We will maintain Mortgage Tax Relief." Yet the Chancellor has cut Mortgage Tax Relief to 15%. After his Budget he told journalists "Luckily we didn't say at what rate." Reported in The Guardian on 2nd December 1993)

National Insurance Contributions have gone up. A penny increase in national insurance tax takes more from the average pay packet than a
penny increase in income tax. national insurance is payable on earnings of just £57 a week. A married person who is the main earner doesn't pay income tax until he or she earns £100 a week. Benefits are also being cut.

In the first full year of Kenneth Clarke's hidden taxes the typical family will pay £500 more in tax. Next year (from April 1995) a typical family will pay £800 more in tax.

Total Increase in Tax for this year.

Gross Earnings:	Single Person:	Married Couple both working:	Married Couple two children:
Annual	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly
£5,200	£3.04	£2.14	£2.00
£7,800	£4.36	£3.33	£5.16
£10,400	£5.91	£5.82	£6.90
£13,000	£7.46	£8.40	£8.51
£15,600	£9.02	£10.02	£10.12
£18,200	£10.57	£11.42	£11.73
£20,800	£12.12	£12.98	£13.34
£23,400	£12.97	£14.55	£14.25
£26,000	£14.00	£16.11	£15.34
£28,600	£17.66	£17.67	£19.91
£31,200	£18.87	£19.23	£24.46

Source: Official Treasury answers to Parliamentary Questions.

For Immediate Release: 14 April 1994
110/94

LIB DEMS ABANDON ANIMAL WELFARE

Key amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill tabled by the Labour Opposition which would have make it an offence to allow dogs to enter land against the express wishes of the landowner or occupier - as is often the case with fox hunting - were voted down by the Government on Tuesday night with the support of Lib Dem MPs.

Another Labour amendment (new clause 22) which would make it a criminal offence to dig for a wild animal sheltering in a subterranean refuge - other than with the consent of the landowner or occupier - was also voted down with the help of a majority of Liberal Democrat MPs.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “As usual, the Lib Dems were facing four ways at the same time. Two of them (David Alton MP and Liz Lynne MP) voted with labour to tighten the law on allowing dogs to enter land but the majority of Lib Dems voted with the Government. Alan Beith MP, Menzies Campbell MP, Alex Carlisle MP, Nick Harvey MP, Nigel Jones MP, Archy Kirkwood MP and Robert MacLennan MP all trooped into the Government lobby. Some couldn’t make up their minds what to do and abstained. Others simply were absent.”

“Moments later, the Lib Dems were again all over the shop on the Labour amendment seeking to outlaw digging for wild animals. David Alton, Liz Lynne and Nigel Jones supported moves to make this a criminal offence but Alan Beith, Menzies Campbell, Alex Carlisle, Nick Harvey, Archy Kirkwood and Robert MacLennan disagreed and voted with the Tories. There was the usual little band of abstainers and the other fly-by-night brigade of Lib Dem MPs who weren’t at Westminster.”

The MP observed: “This cuddly image the Lib Dems foster of being super nice to furry animals is completely phoney. When it comes to the crunch most of them dive for cover and are nowhere to be seen or else vote with the Tories.

My advice to creatures with big ears, a tail and a furry coat is to steer well clear of the Lib Dems. They are fair weather friends."

For Immediate Release: 14 April 1994
111/94

NOTHING TO CELEBRATE ON BIRTHDAY OF LEGAL AID CUTS

The Labour MP for Pendle, Gordon Prentice today condemned the Government for denying access to justice to 12 million British citizens.

The MP said :'This week sees the first anniversary of the Government's savage cuts in legal aid eligibility. Since April 12 1993 only the very poor and the very rich can afford to go to law. Millions of law-abiding people who have legitimate claims for personal injury, unfair dismissal, wrongful eviction and the like are no longer able to pursue those claims."

"British people are supposed to be equal before the law, yet this government is denying that fundamental right to millions of us. Working women are particularly badly affected. Because they are in work they are ineligible for legal aid yet very few are wealthy enough to pay for legal advice and representation themselves. It's a catch 22 situation - totally unjust."

"Last year £60 million was saved on the criminal Legal Aid budget. Labour asked the Government to put this sum towards alleviating some of the hardship caused by the cuts in civil Legal Aid eligibility. The Government refused. It is nothing short of a scandal that those convicted in City fraud trials, like Roger Levitt, get legal aid but that it is unavailable to law-abiding citizens who have suffered real injustices."

"It was a Labour Government which passed the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1948 which stated that it was the duty of the state to assist those of 'small or moderate means' to receive justice. That principle was respected for nearly fifty years. The Tories have destroyed half a century of political consensus. In 1948 three quarters of people were eligible for Legal Aid. The Tories have now reduced that figure to just one-third."

For Immediate Release: 14 April 1994
112/94

MP BACKS RIGHTS OF ANGLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a House of Commons call to support anglers with disabilities.

As a result of a change of policy by the National Rivers Authority (NRA), anglers with disabilities have in many cases had their concessionary rod licences revoked. The NRA now exempts from concessions, anglers in receipt of Disabled Living Allowance or Industrial Injuries Benefit, as well as those able to produce disabled car stickers and bus passes.

Prentice said : 'This change of policy will come as a severe blow to many thousands of disabled anglers nationally and those in Pendle will be very

concerned about the new measure. This penny pinching policy has been adopted simply to save money."

For Immediate Release: 18 April 1994
113/94

CHILDCARE PROVISION "LAMENTABLE" says PENDLE MP

Good childcare facilities should be taken for granted in Britain as they are in many other European countries says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims the UK falls at the bottom of the European Union league table in the public provision of childcare for both children under three and children between three and compulsory school age.

Prentice said: "Under this Government the situation has got worse and there is currently a lower proportion of under fives in local authority nurseries than there were in 1985."

"People who live in areas run by Labour Councils are three times as likely to get a nursery place for their child than those who live in a Conservative area. The Liberal record is also appalling with the Isle of Wight getting the wooden spoon. Of the best 40 local education authorities for nursery school provision, 34 were Labour, 2 Conservative and 1 Liberal. Of the worst 25, not one was controlled by Labour, 19 were Tory and 1 was Liberal."

"We need to see a big change in public policy to take account of the increased numbers of women in the workforce. Here in the North West of all the people in paid employment, 43% were women. By 1993 this has increased to 50%. Other changes have been occuring too. In 1976 about 9% of families with dependent children were headed by lone mothers. By 1991, this had risen to around 17%. In the same year (1991) 81% of full time working women with children under 5 used some form of childcare. However, 36% of these women had to rely on unpaid family and friends and only 6% used a local authority scheme or workplace facility."

"It is as plain as a pikestaff that major changes are needed in public policies yet we have a Government that has belatedly acknowledged the issue but has yet to do something about it."

more follows

Childcare provision

Note to Editors: The table below shows publicly funded childcare places as a percentage of the age group.

	Under 3	3 to school age
France	20%	95%+
Belgium	20%	95%+
Italy	5%	85%+
Denmark	48%	85%
Germany	3%	65 - 70%
Greece	4%	65 - 70%
Spain	na	65 - 70%
Luxembourg	2%	55 - 60%
Netherlands	2%	50 - 55%

Ireland	2%	55%
United Kingdom	2%	35 - 40%
Portugal	6%	35%

For Immediate Release: 18 April 1994
114/94

PRENTICE DEMANDS SIGHT OF DOCUMENTS ON HARTLEY HOSPITAL

The Pendle MP at the centre of the row over the sale of Hartley Hospital in Colne to a mystery group of builders and developers has told Sir Bruce Martin, the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority, he wants access to key documents concerning the sale.

The MP, Gordon Prentice, threw a spotlight on the controversial sale in a Commons debate on 17 March when he claimed all the proper procedures for the disposal of surplus NHS property had not been gone through.

The MP said: "As I understand it the Regional Health Authority has accepted an offer for the hospital but contracts have not as yet been exchanged. I contacted the North West Valuation Office which apparently had a hand in advising the Health Authority on the market value of the site and I have now been told that a report was submitted by the valuer in Burnley to Sir Bruce on 8 February 1994."

"That report concluded that the value of the site for existing hospital or institutional use was the same as for the site with a planning permission for residential use but this defies common sense. A site with permission for two houses would be worth less than a site with planning permission for 22. The same logic applies for a conversion of the hospital into luxury flats."

"The valuer told me the report was drawn up on the basis of instructions from the Regional Health Authority and the nature of this brief - and the assumptions it makes - is clearly important and I need to see it. The valuer has also told me the details are covered by client confidentiality and cannot be disclosed. I have therefore asked Sir Bruce to tell me what was in the brief."

Note to editors: Health Department rules oblige health authorities to seek planning permission for surplus health service sites which go on the market if this is likely to enhance their value. No such planning application has been submitted to Pendle Council, the local planning authority, by the Regional Health Authority. The MP claims the propertry, which lies in the green belt where rules against development are very strict, has been sold with residential use in mind - a use specifically ruled out by Pendle Council.

For Immediate Release: 18 April 1994
115/94

CUTS IN RAILWAY MAINTENANCE "HORRIFYING" says PENDLE MP

News that Railtrack - the company that took over responsibility for British Rail's track and infrastructure this month - is planning to cut back on maintenance has horrified Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says any cuts could

imperil the future of lines in North East Lancashire that have already been starved of investment.

Today's Financial Times tells us that Mr Bob Horton, the Chairman of Railtrack, apparently believes that cutting maintenance costs is a top priority if the company is to be successfully privatised. I saw this coming ages ago and it is as certain as night follows day that privatisation will lead to cuts and line closures."

The FT quotes Mr Horton as saying that he didn't want money for maintenance "sloshing around going to the person who shouts the loudest". Well I want Mr Horton to know that we in North east Lancashire have been shouting for more investment and with good reason. I had to tell the Prime Minister in the House of Commons last year that the trains running between Nelson and Colne in my constituency were running more slowly than George Stephenson's Rocket in 1829!"

"I find this report deeply worrying and I have today written to Mr Horton requesting assurances that there will be no cuts in maintenance on track in North East Lancashire and that there will be increased investment and no cut backs."

"The whole thing is simply incredible. Trains cannot run unless the track is in tip top condition."

ends

Note to Editors: On 25 May last year, the Pendle MP told a packed House of Commons he wanted action to lift the 20mph speed limit for trains on the Nelson to Colne railway line.

Railway maintenance cuts "horrifying"

Prentice told Tony Newton MP - who was standing in for the Prime Minister at Question Time - that the trains in his constituency were travelling 9 miles slower than the first ever passenger train in England. "In 1829, George Stephenson's Rocket achieved a speed of 29mph on its journey from Liverpool to Manchester. Now, 164 years later, my local trains are chugging along at a slower speed."

At the time Prentice said: "It is as plain as a pikestaff the current troubles result from years of chronic under-investment in our rail system. Rail privatisation is no answer. We have a puffing billy at the moment but after privatisation we'll have no railway at all."

In his letter dated 17 March, the Chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid said: "The section of track between Rose Grove and Colne is both difficult and expensive to maintain. The position is exacerbated by the use of Class 142 "Pacer" units on the East Lancashire Line. These trains are formed of two axle vehicles and, although economical to operate, their ride characteristics and weight distribution are such that they take their toll of jointed track.

"Continuing pressure on Regional Railways finances is such that my local people are obliged to prioritise maintenance expenditure in favour of those routes which generate the most business. The unavoidable corollary for Colne, and a number of other routes. is that track condition deteriorates. A potential

reduction is speed inevitably follows. hence the present 20mph restriction which must be regarded as permanent until such time as more funding becomes available...

In December 1993, British Rail finally responded to pressure and did some much needed maintenance work on the track.

For Immediate Release: 19 April 1994
116/94

RAIL PRIVATISATION COSTING A FORTUNE says PENDLE MP

Rail privatisation is costing a fortune says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "Up to now the Government haven't managed to sell off any of British Rail, but they've squandered a fortune on rail privatisation.

"Between them, the Government and British Rail are spending over £446 million just preparing for privatisation. None of this money has been invested in new equipment or rolling stock for the railway. Some has gone on redundancies but most of it is being paid to lawyers, accountants, merchant bankers and public relations advisers. Not much of that money is going to anyone in Pendle. Nearly all of it is going to the City of London."

"Instead of pouring these millions into the pockets of their friends, the Government should have invested it in desperately needed improvements on the railways. For example, £446 million invested in the railway would have paid three times over for electrifying the Trans Pennine line between Liverpool and Hull."
Instead it's all been thrown down the drain. What a waste of money."

ends

Note to Editors: On 1 April, British Rail was split into 80 separate operating units, including 25 separate passenger train operating companies, which will be required to operate as independent 'shadow' franchises to prepare for privatisation.

No part of British Rail has yet been privatised but the cost of preparing for privatisation is proving to be enormous. The direct extra cost to British Rail over the period 1992-93 to 1996-97 is estimated to total at least £346 million. The direct extra cost to the Department of Transport over the same period is estimated to total £100 million. This means that at least £446 million will be spent on privatisation.

Not a single penny of this will have been invested in new equipment or rolling stock for the railways. All of it will have been spent elsewhere.

THE COST TO BRITISH RAIL

British Rail spent £10 million in 1992-93 in preparing for privatisation, £56 million in 1993-94 and will spend £80 Million this year(1994-95). In addition British Rail last year spent £100 million in redundancy costs associated with privatisation. They expect to spend a further £50 million on the direct costs of

privatisation in both 1995-96 and 1996-7. This gives a total of £346 million without making allowance for any further redundancy costs.

THE COST TO THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

In addition to the costs incurred by British Rail, the (cost to the Department of Transport of preparing for privatisation is estimated by them to total at least £48 million over the period 1992-93 to 1996-97. The cost of the newly created Office of Passenger Rail Franchising will be £32 million between 1993-94 and 1996-97. The Office of the Rail Regulator (OFRAIL) over the same period will be £20 million.

This gives a total of £100 million of taxpayers' money being spent on additional bureaucracy, and exorbitant fees to management consultants, merchant bankers, P.R. firms, lawyers and other advisers.

WHAT THIS MONEY COULD HAVE BOUGHT

If this money had not been frittered away on expensive preparations for privatisation it might have been invested instead in new equipment and rolling stock for the railway. Given below are a few examples of what this money could have bought for British Rail

- up to 37 new Inter City trains;
- or up to 178 new Network SouthEast electrics;
- or up to 223 new locomotives;
- or 9 or 10 major re-signalling schemes.

Put another way, £446 million made available for investment would have

- paid four times over for electrifying the Midland Main Line between Bedford and Sheffield; or

- paid eight times over for electrifying the Edinburgh to Aberdeen Line; or

- paid three times over for electrifying the Trans-Pennine Line between Liverpool and Hull; or met half the cost of uprating the West Coast Main Line.

Instead of being invested in this way to bring tangible benefits to every part of Britain, the money taken from the taxpayer and passengers has been poured instead into the same firms of consultants, advisers, merchant banks and brokers in the City who have done so well out of other privatisations.

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1994
117/94

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR SAFER TRAVEL BY COACH AND MINIBUS

"People in Pendle need protection for safer travel in coaches and minibuses but the Government are blocking it." says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice said: "Too many people in Pendle, especially children, are put at risk each year when they travel by coach and minibus. We need to give them greater protection, including insisting that they are protected by seatbelts and driven by specially tested and licensed drivers.

"That's why Labour has called on the Government to hold urgent talks with all interested organisations so that a way can be found to improve safety in coaches and minibuses. But the Tory Minister has turned down Labour's offer and said that any action "would not be wise".

"I'm absolutely appalled by this decision. That's why I've signed a parliamentary motion this week asking him to hold talks and take some action to improve coach and minibus safety. People in Pendle deserve nothing less."

Note to Editors: These are the key points in Labour's campaign for safer coach and minibus travel

• Installing and wearing of seat belts in coaches and minibuses to be compulsory. Regulation of internal design and seat layout to be determined after talks with the bus and coach industry.

• Licensing of coach and minibus drivers to be made compulsory. Local registers of licensed drivers to be collated and available for public inspection. Specific licensing system to be determined after talks with the voluntary and educational sectors.

• End of the 'three for two' rule for children in large seats.

• Compulsory fitting of fuel tank cut-off devices and electrical system cut-off devices in all new coaches and minibuses.

• Voluntary operated minibuses to be required to take a full Public Service Vehicle MOT tests.

• Discussions to be held with insurance industry to provide incentives for upgrading of existing buses, coaches and minibuses.

• Discussions to be held with motoring organisations, consumer groups and motorway users before introducing improvements in service area provision, rest/picnic areas, motorway lighting and information systems and roadworks.

Note 2 This is the text of the Commons Early Day Motion supported by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice

Title: GOVERNMENT REFUSAL OF TALKS ON CHILDREN'S SAFETY IN COACHES AND MINIBUSES

That this House congratulates the Belt Up School Kids organisation on its national lobby of Parliament calling for greater safety for children in coaches and minibuses; notes the recent launch by the Hon Member for Holborn and St Pancras and the Hon Member for Stoke on Trent North of the "Safety in Transit" campaign for safer coach and minibus travel, including installation of seatbelts in minibuses and coaches, licensing of coach and minibus drivers, an end to the 'three for two' rule for children in coach and minibus seats and a full PSV test for voluntary operated minibuses; further notes that this

campaign was launched with the support of Belt Up School Kids, British Roads Federation, Bus and Coach Council, Community Transport Association, National Union of Teachers, RAC and RoSPA; welcomes the fact that as part of this campaign, the Hon Member for Holborn and St Pancras wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport calling on him to convene urgent discussions with all interested organisations to find a way to make travel safer for Britain's coach and minibus passengers; deplores the fact that the Secretary of State turned down this offer from the Hon Member for Holborn and St Pancras saying "it would not be wise to consider making further regulations in this area"; and calls on the Secretary of State to reconsider this ill-judged decision and take immediate action to improve rapidly safety for all passenger~ using coaches and minibuses.

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1994
118/94

HARTLEY HOSPITAL
BBC NORTHWESTMINSTER

The controversial sale of Hartley Hospital will feature in a special report on the BBC North West regional Parliamentary programme Northwestminster this Sunday (24 April) at 2.00pm.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be giving his views on the latest developments.

Northwestminster is on air from 2pm - 2.30pm.

Monday 18 April 94

Hartley petition letter

This is the text of the Hartley Hospital Letter which should go to everyone who signed the petition. Apart from the surgery casework this is a top priority to get done:

19 April 94

Dear person

I thought I would drop you a line to let you know what is happening with Hartley Hospital. I know of your interest as you signed a petition about the hospital which has been handed to me. You should know that you are but one of thousands of people in Colne and beyond who feel strongly - as I do - that this much loved hospital should be retained and put to an appropriate use.

Events are moving very quickly and by the time you receive this the situation may have changed - hopefully for the better. But, as it stands at the moment, the position is this. The North West Regional Health Authority who own the building on behalf of the National Health Service have decided to sell it to an unnamed buyer who, allegedly, wants to develop the site for luxury housing. I am totally opposed to this and I have been trying to block the sale. Contracts have yet to be exchanged so there is everything to fight for.

I believe the proper procedures have not been followed by the Regional Health Authority and I am challenging the chairman, Sir Bruce Martin, to let me have sight of all the relevant documents surrounding the sale. I shall keep you posted on any developments. In the meantime I am enclosing, for your information, a copy of a speech I made about the Hartley Hospital affair in the House of Commons on 17 March this year.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice MP

PENDLE JOB WATCH: Jobless totals since John Major became PM
from Gordon Prentice MP

Unemployed	Date	Rate	Colne	Vacancies	Nelson
1708	Nov-90	4.5			
2037	Dec-90	5.3			
2199	Jan-91	5.7			
2286	Feb-91	5.9			
2467	Mar-91	6.4			
2494	Apr-91	6.5			
2548	May-91	6.6			
2608	Jun-91	6.8			
2752	Jul-91	7.1			
2815	Aug-91	7.3			
2762	Sep-91	7.2			
2651	Oct-91	6.9			
2610	Nov-91	6.8			
2684	Dec-91	7			
3001	Jan-92	7.8			
2958	Feb-92	7.7			
2948	Mar-92	7.6			
3020	Apr-92	7.8			
3064	May-92	7.9			
3015	Jun-92	7.8			
3274	Jul-92	8.5			
3355	Aug-92	8.7			
3216	Sep-92	8.3			
2950	Oct-92	7.6	114	Oct-92	368
2822	Nov-92	7.3	110	Nov-92	236
3006	Dec-92	7.8	102	Dec-92	166
3161	Jan-93	8.2	49	Jan-93	160
3031	Feb-93	7.9	91	Feb-93	150
3025	Mar-93	7.8	93	Mar-93	128
2972	Apr-93	*7.9	87	Apr-93	158
2861	May-93	7.6	110	May-93	160
2928	Jun-93	7.8	113	Jun-93	176
3234	Jul-93	8.6	99	Jul-93	142
3237	Aug-93	8.6	121	Aug-93	155
3065	Sep-93	8.1	99	Sep-93	196
2783	Oct-93	7.4	124	Oct-93	349
2719	Nov-93	7.2	105	Nov-93	261
2772	Dec-93	7.4	96	Dec-93	153
2968	Jan-94	7.9	115	Jan-94	136

2922	Feb-94	7.8	74	Feb-94	135
2960	Mar-94	7.9	79	Mar-94	157

*change in method of calculating working population

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1994
121/94

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN

Latest unemployment figures for Pendle show an increase in March to 2,960 (7.9%) from 2,922 (7.8%) in February. Of the March total, 2,255 are men and 705 women.

Vacancies are down in Colne compared with the same point last year - but up at the Nelson Job Centre.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice commented: "We have been endlessly reassured that the economic recovery is under way but, if so, it hasn't reached us here in North East Lancashire. The figure is way over the level John Major inherited when he embarked on his ill-fated premiership. The level then - 1,708 - looks triumphant now."

For Immediate Release: 20 April 1994
122/94

PRIVATE COMPANIES POISED TO TAKE OVER KEY COUNCIL FUNCTIONS

Enabling powers which would allow local authorities to contract out to the private sector sensitive functions such as the determination of planning applications, licensing and school admissions have been agreed by the standing committee considering the controversial Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill.

The Deregulation Minister, Neil Hamilton, who is a paid up member of the *No Turning Back Group* of right wing Tory MPs told the Committee yesterday that the enabling powers would allow councils to contract out these key functions - subject to appropriate Parliamentary Orders being laid. He told MPs he knew of no proposals to move these functions into the private sector but saw no difficulties in the private sector taking responsibility for them.

Committee member, Gordon Prentice, said: "Neil Hamilton is the type of Tory MP who wants to privatise everything that isn't nailed down. The clauses in Part II of the Bill will allow private contractors to bid for and run almost any local authority function - and to take key decisions associated with it."

"This is the latest example of Conservative lunacy. There is no support in the wider community for these measures which are driven by ideology and nothing more."

For Immediate Release: 23 April 1994
123/94

MP TAKES THE FLAK OVER CSA

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told a rally today in Burnley that an urgent review was needed on the operation of the controversial Child Support Agency. The MP, addressing a crowd of hundreds, was heckled and jeered when he opened by saying there was no disagreement between the political parties - and in the wider community - that the biological parents have a duty to contribute to the maintenance of their children.

The beleaguered MP, whose microphone failed at the end of his speech, admitted that it wasn't a happy experience being howled down by the furious crowd.

The MP said afterwards: "I was being invited to say we should go back to the old system and I simply wasn't going to say that just to get a brief cheer. I know there are a million things wrong with the present system and it needs to be urgently and thoroughly reviewed but there is no going back to the old system of court maintenance orders where hundreds of thousands of women never got a bean from their ex-husbands. I know the problems caused by the present system and I don't need to be told what they are by men from all over the north of England screaming at me from a distance of ten feet."

"I have a steady stream of people coming to my surgeries telling me real horror stories. The CSA is wrecking people's lives and it needs to be urgently reformed or it will never command public confidence."

"People on the march were really fired up - and with good reason. We have had one review of the CSA but the 7 February changes are totally inadequate. There are still thousands of victims of the new system and the list is swelling daily.

Note to editors: Labour believes a parent has a duty to contribute to the maintenance of his or her child. We have, however, major criticisms of the way the CSA is operating in practice.

At the Second Reading of the 1991 Act Labour divided the House on a reasoned amendment, setting out our objections on such matters as "clean break" settlements and adequate protection for second families.

The opposition has led the fight for reform, forcing debates in the House. With hundreds of thousands of cases still in the system, there is a great deal of unhappiness still to come. The Government changes which took effect on 7th February are totally inadequate.

• An independent appeal procedure should be introduced now. There has to be flexibility in the system that allows individual circumstances to be taken into account Labour will re-examine the phasing arrangements to try and reduce the strain of unexpected and very substantial increases in maintenance demands. An assessment must not become detached from ability to pay That is fatal, as the Poll Tax proved.

• Financial and property transfers made at the time of separation must be taken into account. If the parties intended such an agreement would affect maintenance, it is quite wrong that this should not be recognised by the CSA.

• There must be an urgent review of the administration. The long delays between the issuing of the enquiry form and the final assessment have left many facing formidable debt The £44 annual administration fee adds to the sense of injustice.

• The priority should be broadening the base of collection. It is important that those who have not contributed, and will not, are pursued with energy

• There must be no circumstances in which the income of a second wife can leave her husband facing higher maintenance payments.

• Parents with care also face difficulties There have been cases referred to the Benefits Agency for a deduction from Income Support because of alleged non co-operation Fortunately these have not been common, but contact with the Agency can be an unhappy experience particularly If there has been a history of violence.

• There is a strong case for a disregard against benefit. Ministers have estimated that in the Agency's first year. 80% of the money collected will go to reduce Treasury expenditure. The children most at risk in economic terms - those living in families dependent upon Income Support - are the least likely to benefit from increased maintenance payments.

Note 2 to Editors: On 22 December 1993, the Department of Social Security issued a Press Release in which Alastair Burt, Minister for Social Security, announced changes to the new child maintenance scheme. These were implemented on 7 February.

The Change: Phasing in, over up to 18 months, of the new amounts of maintenance for absent parents with second families who already had formal maintenance agreements under the old system, to give them time to adjust to their new liabilities.
Burt's comment: "I accept that it may be difficult for absent parents to adapt rapidly to paying increased maintenance particularly where they have second families and they have planned their finances in the expectation that the existing maintenance agreements was fixed for the time being. That is why I have decided to extend the limited current provision for phasing in new amounts to all absent parents with second families and on existing maintenance agreement."
What it means: Absent parents with second families and with an existing formal maintenance agreement, whose maintenance is assessed at £60 or over a week, will have their liability phased in over 18 months, in six monthly steps of £20 or 25% of the difference between the old and new liability if this is higher. Currently, help is restricted to absent parents with second families whose new liability is less than £60 per week.

The Change: Helping absent parents on protected lower incomes by a substantial increase in the minimum income they may keep after paying maintenance.
Burt's Comment: "The present formula contains a provision intended to ensure that absent parents remain better off working than relying on income support. The maintenance assessment is reduced to ensure that the absent parent retains a level of protected income at least £8 a week above what he and his second family would be entitled to on income support. I propose to nearly quadruple the margin above income support to £30.

The Change: Increasing the additional proportion of income just above the protected minimum which absent parents may keep to strengthen work incentives.
Burt's comment: "Income support. I propose to nearly quadruple the margin above income support to £30. In addition absent parents with incomes a little above the protected income level will retain at least 15% (instead of 10%) of any income above protected income.
What it means: The margins in protected income, which ensures that absent parents and their new families stay above income support levels, are increased. The basic margin rises to £30 above the level of the income support that the absent parent and his/her new family would get if he/she were out of work. The additional margin rises to 15% of the difference between that amount and the total family income. Before 7 February, the margins were £8 and 10% respectively.

The Change: Reducing the additional amounts asked of absent parents who have paid the full amount of basic maintenance, where there are only one or two children involved.
Burt's explanation: A provision of the present formula which has led to some of the biggest increases in maintenance assessments is the "additional deduction". This is the requirement that absent parents whose assessable income is more than sufficient to pay the basic maintenance must pay an additional amount equal to 25% of their excess assessable income. I propose to reduce this to 15% where there is only one child eligible for maintenance, and to 20% where there are two children. It will remain at 25% where there are three or more children."
What it means: The additional payment made by absent parents who can afford to make a contribution above the basic maintenance requirement
will be reduced from 25% to 15% where there is only one child and to 20% where there are two.

The Change: Reducing the amount paid for the care of the children as they grow older, by a quarter at 11 and a further quarter at 14.
Burt's explanation: "The maintenance formula recognises that children need adult care.But it does not at present acknowledge any reduction in the care needs as children grow up. I propose to reduce the care element by a quarter at age 11 and to half its present level at 14."
What it means: A staged reduction, as children get older, in the parent as carer element in the formula. This provides for the costs of caring for the child, rather than the costs of their food, clothes and so on. The carer element in the maintenance requirement will be reduced to 75% of the maximum when the youngest child is aged 11 and to 50% at age 14.

The change: Waiving the £34 a year collection fee charged to absent parents where the parent with acre is on benefit - unless the Agency is actually collecting or enforcing the maintenance. There are other changes which include allowing the use of deduction from earnings orders for "interim maintenance assessments" issued in cases where the absent parent refuses to give the CSA proper information to calculate maintenance; allowing the full use of endowment mortgages (including with profits element) for mortgages under £60,000 to be set against income when new maintenance assessments are made or yearly reviews undertaken.

For Immediate Release: 26 April 1994

124/94

MP TO MEET TARMAC ABOUT KNOTT'S LANE CEMENT WORKS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves by Pendle Council to prevent the re-opening of the old cement works at the top of Knott's Lane. The construction giant, Tarmac, intends to reactivate the site which could mean heavy lorries, laden with cement. trundling up and down this residential street.

Prentice commented: "I want to see Tarmac go to an industrial site in the Borough where they can't do any harm. Knott's Lane is a residential area and the cement works is a totally inappropriate use."

"I know the Council is exploring every avenue to stop this proposal dead in its tracks and I have written to the company seeking an urgent meeting with them."

Note to Editors: A meeting of the Council's Planning Committee yesterday voted unanimously to defer consideration of a planning application from the company so that further alternatives could be explored.

For Immediate Release: 26 April 1994
125/94

RISE IN ASSAULTS ON THE POLICE

Figures released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show assaults on the police in Lancashire are on the increase. In the period from 1989 - 1992 (the latest year for which figures are available) assaults on the police spiralled up by 53% - from 285 to 436.

The MP commented: "We are living in a society where violent attacks are becoming more common Last year violent crime was up 4% despite a slight fall in the number of total offences. But what strikes me is the scale of increase in assaults on the police here in our own back yard."

"I have told the Home Secretary that the police must have access to body armour and other measures for their own self defence when they ask for it. It seems that every time we turn on the television there is yet another story of a policeman or women stabbed or otherwise badly injured while trying to protect the general public. The record of the so-called Party of law and order is truly appalling."

Note to Editors: The Chief Inspector of Constabulary, in his most recent report, expresses "concern about the number of police officers assaulted with an increasing level of violence."

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 29 April 1994
126/94

NEW REPORT REVEALS "UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH" ABOUT LOCAL NHS

Gordon Prentice MP for Pendle has welcomed the publication today of a new Labour Party report which details "the uncomfortable truth" about the NHS in the North West.

It shows that in the north west region:

• there has been a reduction in acute hospital beds by 20%, down from 13,545 in 1979 to 10,880 in 1992/93

• there has been a 136% increase in private beds in private hospitals over the same period - up from 291 in 1979 to 686 in 1992/93

• latest Department of Health figures show that as of December 1993 there were 101,506 people waiting for hospital treatment, including 7,582 waiting more than 12 months

• the pay bill for managers in the NHS has rocketed from £9.7 million in 1989/90 to £20.5 million in 1992/93 after the Tory health reforms - an increase of 209%

The 26 page fact-filled report - Taking the Temperature: an audit of the NHS 19791994 - was launched by Shadow Health Minister Dawn Primarolo in London.

Gordon Prentice said: "I am dismayed to see such a massive sums spent on bureaucracy while the waiting lists for people in my constituency get longer. And I am shocked to see the stark increase in private hospital beds while the Government has been telling us that hospital closures are acceptable because the NHS needs less beds now. The Conservatives promised to reform the NHS but I am afraid they have deformed it instead."

NHS in the North West

Dawn Primarolo said: "Labour's new report is a damning indictment of 15 years stewardship of the NHS by the Conservatives. It reveals there are less hospitals, more bureaucracy, longer waiting lists and greater private health care. With the internal market, GP fundholders and contracts, that process of deterioration is unfortunately continuing. The four cornerstones upon which the NHS was built - comprehensiveness, equity, low overheads and that it is free at the point of delivery - are increasingly being undermined by the Conservatives."

For Immediate Release: 26 April 1994
127/94

HARTLEY HOSPITAL SALE STILL SHROUDED IN SECRECY

48 hours after the TV spotlight was thrown on the controversial sale of Hartley Hospital in Colne by the BBC's regional Parliamentary programme, Northwestminster, the MP at the centre of the row has discovered the involvement of the District Auditor in settling the value of the site was immaterial.

The Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice said: "I have now discovered that a couple of years ago the Department of Health "untied" nine Regional Health Authorities from the requirement to take advice from the District Auditor before selling surplus NHS property. It is now up to the "untied" RHAs themselves to decide the value of what they are trying to sell."

"As I understand it, this was an administrative decision between the Department and the Health Authorities and nothing was ever published. There are still RHAs that are "tied" and need to consult the Auditor. One of them is Merseyside RHA which merged with the "untied" North West RHA on 1 April."

"I am still waiting to hear from the new merged RHA about the Hartley sale. The more I probe into this, the more astonishing are the practices I uncover."

"There is a dense shroud of secrecy blanketing our NHS."

For Immediate Release: 27 April 1994
128/94

ADVICE ON D-DAY "A SCANDALOUS WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has been told by the Prime Minister that the Government has spent over £60,000 on buying public relations advice on how to commemorate D-Day from Sir Tim Bell - the PR wizard who was recommended for a knighthood by Margaret Thatcher when she was Prime Minister.

The Pendle MP commented: "It is absolutely grotesque for any public money at all to be shelled out to this particular belted Knight to come up with ludicrous "spam fritter" ideas to mark the historic 50th anniversary of the D-Day landings. To get over £60,000 is nothing short of a scandal. He is the man who advised the former Prime Minister on how best to modify her voice, her hairstyle and her body language allegedly to soften her image with the public without softening the impact of her policies. He got knighted as a result. He has been on the pay-roll of the the Conservatives for years."

The Prime Minister told the Pendle MP the D-Day contract was worth £50,000 plus a maximum of £12,500 for expenses net of VAT. The contract was let by the Department of National Heritage to Lowe Bell Communications on 24 January *"to help with its programme of civilian events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landings."*

"I can think of a hundred ways this money could have been better spent" said the MP.

For Immediate Release: 3 May 1994
129/94

"KEEP THE FORESTS PUBLIC" says PENDLE MP

The nation's forests should be open to the public, with full rights of access, says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He was speaking at the weekend after joining

200 trekkers in a 25 mile walk through some of Pendle's most beautiful countryside. The event was organised by the Pendle Forest Scouts and Guides.

His call comes at a time of heightened uncertainty about the future of the Forestry Commission which the Government may put into the private sector.

The MP said: "Full public access to woodlands must be guaranteed and landowners who unreasonably refuse to offer public access should be ineligible for any form of public subsidy or tax break arising from the use of their land. There are vast tracts of no-go areas in some of the most beautiful parts of Lancashire. This is an burning issue for those who enjoy the countryside and it's one an incoming Labour Government will address."

ends

Note to Editors: Ministers are now considering the report of the review group set up last year to consider the privatisation of Britain's forests. They have not yet said when they will announce any decisions.

The response to the privatisation proposal has been universally hostile. The Government has revealed that over 300 organisations and 1,359 people have made submissions to the review Group on the questions of access to woodlands, security of timber supplies and the environment and that "in so far as these issues might be affected by privatisation, virtually all commentators are opposed".

167 local authorities - many of them Conservative controlled - have called on the Government not to put public access to Forestry Commission land in jeopardy by privatising them. These include Suffolk Coastal, in John Gummer's constituency.

Loss of Public Access. The Forestry Commission operates a policy of allowing everybody the "freedom to roam" on all its lands. The Government

claims that selling off Forestry Commission lands does not lead to any loss of public access. But its own report into the matter, published in January, shows the opposite to be true. "It is quite clear that access (whether potential or actual) has been lost" (Report of the Group Formed to Review the Forestry Commission's Continued Public Access Arrangements for Woodland after sale. January 1994, Para 117).

Since the arrangements intended to safeguard access were introduced in 1990, hundreds of woods have been sold. Not a single one has been accompanied by an access agreement.

Higher Costs. the Government appointed consultants Environmental Resources Management to look at the pros and cons of privatisation. their report, completed in January and subsequently leaked, reveals that the cost to the Exchequer of providing the same environmental safeguards and access in the private sector as are currently provided by the Forestry Commission would be £40 million per year - more than double the current cost.

The most probable outcome of the Review now appears to be that the Forestry Commission will be turned into a Next Steps Agency. If its remit is similar to the current Commission's the effect will be minimal. But if the Agency is given a wholly or predominantly commercial remit, the effect could be to lose many of the environmental benefits of forestry and perhaps ripen the forests for future privatisation.

For Immediate Release: 3 May 1994
130/94

LOW PAY "DISFIGURING BRITAIN"

Low pay is disfiguring Tory Britain says MP, Gordon Prentice, whose Pendle constituency lies in one of the nation's most notorious low pay blackspots.

Prentice said: "There are around 4.5 million employees in Britain who, at the last election, would have benefited from a minimum wage of £3.40 per hour. Wages Councils, before their abolition, covered around 2.5m low paid employees - mainly women - in retailing, hotels and catering, hairdressing and textile industries. At their abolition last year, wages council minimum rates ranged from £2.58 per hour to £3.20 per hour."

Good employers who want to develop their employees and invest in skills should have no difficulties in paying half decent wage rates. And even then, comparisons are only valid with internationally tradeable goods and services. The idea that someone wanting a haircut would fly off to Hong Kong because they're cheaper there illustrates just how nonsensical the proposition is that some industries have to pay slave labour rates simply to survive."

"There is also a growing disparity in pay between top earners and bottom earners" (see note 1).

ends

Note 1 to Editors: Average full time pay for the bottom ten per cent of male earners was 36% of the average of the top ten per cent in 1983. In 1993 it had dropped to 29%. Average full time pay of the bottom ten per cent of female earners was 38% of the top ten per cent of female earners in 1983. In 1993 it had dropped to 31%.

Note 2: The only reliable source for pay statistics is the annual New earnings Survey, a snapshot survey taken in April each year and published in the Autumn.

more follows

Low Pay

Average pay April 1993

	Ave Hourly Pay			Ave Wkly Pay		
	Male FT	Female FT	Part Time	Male FT	Female FT	Part Time
	£per hour	£per hour	£per hour	£ per week	£ per week	£ per week
Manual	6.05	4.35	3.90	274.30	177.10	73.70
Non manual	10.69	7.20	5.50	418.20	268.70	106.20
All	8.47	6.68	4.94	353.50	252.60	94.60

Council of Europe's decency threshold (68% of mean gross weekly earnings) is £5.75 per hour or £215.50 per week. Around nine million workers (43% of all employees in employment) earn less than £5.75 per hour.

Female Full Time average earnings as a proportion of male full time average earnings.

	1990		1990
Denmark	84.5	W Germany	73.2
Italy	82.7	Spain	71.9
France	80.8	Portugal	71.6
Greece	76.3	UK	68.2
Belgium	75.9	Ireland	68.1
Netherlands	75.3	Luxembourg	65.1

For Immediate Release: 3 May 1994
131/94

ECONOMY "NEVER BEEN WORSE" says PENDLE MP

The British economy has never been in a worse state according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said 15 years of Tory Government had put the economy on a life support system where the slightest shock to the system could mean catastrophe.

The MP, a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party's backbench Treasury Committee, said: "We have seen whole sectors of British industry wiped out or transfer to foreign control. Unemployment is endemic and there is no drive or commitment to train people for the skills they - and the country - will need in the future."

"The raw data for my criticism of the Government comes from official statistics - or those that have not as yet been massaged and manipulated as is the case with the jobless totals."

"The Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) for 1993/4 was £45.9 billion, the highest ever recorded for a financial year. The PSBR in March 1994 alone was £11.3 billion, the highest ever recorded for a single month. What a state of affairs for the Party of supposedly sound public finance."

ends

Note to Editors: The Tories turned a £14.7 billion public sector surplus in 1988/9 into a £45.9 billion public sector deficit in 1993/4. That's a turn around of £61 billion or 10% of GDP in 5 years.

Central Government borrowing in 1993/4 amounted to 7.5% of GDP. The highest it reached under the last Labour Government was 5%.

INCOMPETENCE AND BROKEN PROMISES ON PUBLIC FINANCE

The Tories talk about sound public finance but they are constantly shifting their views of what that means:

Economy "never been worse"

In 1988, John Major, then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said that meant no borrowing at all: "for future years our strategy will be based on a zero public sector borrowing requirement" (Hansard 16-3-88)

In 1991, Chancellor Norman Lamont said that meant no net borrowing over the economic cycle - so borrowing during recession could be compensated for by.surplus during a boom. And in the 1992 election manifesto, the Tories qualified their position even further: "We will see the budget return towards balance as the economy recovers"

Now Kenneth Clarke says it means no borrowing at all again: "the Budget must sort out the problem of public borrowing once and for all... The measures I am announcing ...should eliminate government borrowing entirely by the end of the decade." (Unified Budget 30 c 93 Hansard.)

The Tories have no credibility on achieving their public finance targets:

The PSBR in 1993/4 was £46 billion. As Chancellor in March 1990, John Major forecast that the PSBR for 1993/4 would be zero. And before the election in March 1992, the Tories forecast that the 1993/4 PSBR would only be £32 billion.

Now Kenneth Clarke has forecast that the PSBR will fall to £2 billion by 1998/9. But his forecasts depend on: a) the economy achieving continuously high rates of growth for the next five years 2.5% in 1994/5, 2.75% in 95/6 and 3% in each of the following three,years. The truth of the Tory record so far is that growth has averaged barely 1.75% since 1979. b) keeping public spending growth to less than 1%. The truth of the Tory record is that public spending has grown by an average of 1.8% since 1979.

BAD PUBLIC FINANCE BECAUSE BAD ON THE ECONOMY

The Tories cannot deliver on public finance because they cannot deliver on the economy .

The Tories are not borrowing to finance capital spending, such as investment in infrastructure, transport, hospitals and schools. They are borrowing to pay for their economic mistakes.

Unemployment is the biggest cause of deteriorating public finance. Each person unemployed costs the Exchequer £9,000 in benefits and lost revenue, according to the Department of Employment. That means unemployment is costing the Exchequer £24.5 billion - more than half the PSBR in 1993/4.

BORROWING FOR CURRENT SPENDING NOT BORROWING FOR INVESTMENT

The Tories have broken the "Golden Rule" that government should not borrow to finance current expenditure. Borrowing should be undertaken to finance investment which increases the productivity of the economy and hence generate revenues to finance service of the debt.

In 1992/3 the Tories were the first Government ever to break the Golden Rule. In 1993/4 nearly half the £46 billion public borrowing was used to finance current spending. On the Chancellor's own admission (in his

Economy "never been worse"

November 1993 Budget speech), the Government will not eliminate borrowing to finance current spending until 1997/8.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT FAILURES, LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORESIGHT

The Tories have attacked Labour local councils on borrowing. But the truth is that local authorities have borrowed to invest in future assets, whilst Tory central government has borrowed to pay for past economic mistakes Local authorities use the money to build houses, schools local transport infrastructure and recreational facilities. Tory Central Government uses the money to pay for unemployment and the bills of economic failure.

It is Tory Central Government which has run up such a huge borrowing requirement. It borrowed £47.8 billion in 1993/4 while public corporations were borrowing only £0 8 billion and local authorities were paying £2 7 billion back to the Exchequer.

The total Local Authorities Borrowing Requirement over the last 15 years of Tory Government amounted to £10.1 billion. Central Government borrowing over the period was £128.3 billion.

All local authority borrowing was used to finance capital spending - as is demanded by Treasury rules. Net capital spending by local authorities during the 15 years of Tory rule has been nearly 5 times as high as their borrowing

For Immediate Release: 5 May 1994
132/94

MP SLATES PRINCE'S "BACK TO BASICS" SPEECH

The Labour MP for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, has waded in with further criticism of last night's controversial "Back to Basics" speech by the Prince of Wales which he described as "off-the-wall". The MP said the Prince should stick to traditional royal duties and steer clear of politics unless he wants to embroil the monarchy in party political debate.

"Here is a man who lectures the country about the undermining of institutions yet who is responsible for the way in which, say, the monarchy is now viewed? None other than members of the Royal Family itself."

"The Prince's views on education and much else have been shaped by his privileged upbringing and wealth. He doesn't have special insights denied the rest of us. "

"It is about time the institution of monarchy was brought into the 21st century. If, in this day and age, we are to continue to have a constitutional monarchy - where even the Queen is now a citizen of the European Union just like the rest of us - then it needs to be pared down and modernised. And the monarch and heir to the throne should pay tax just like the rest of us and not by royal grace and favour and "understandings" with the Inland Revenue."

ends

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP told the 1992 Labour Party Conference that the House of Windsor was crying out to be reformed. He also called on the monarch to be brought fully into taxation.

For Immediate Release: 1 May 1994
133/94

"GREY" MP GOES TECHNICOLOR
(not sent!)

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has told the Observer's political pundit, Andrew Rawnsley, he is not quite so grey as he has been painted.

In today's edition of the Observer, Rawnsley, took six columns to lament the decline in the number of colorful Members of Parliament. The piece was prompted by the news that the tartan clad and permanently inebriated Tory MP, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, had decided not to seek re-election at the next General Election on the grounds that the Commons had been taken over by "political clones". Fairbairn said he wanted to quit before he was *"drowned in a sea of classless lookalikes".*

Rawnsley singled out the Pendle MP as an example of the cardboard cut-out grey MPs that are colonising the House of Commons.

Rawnsley described the Tory MP for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) as "memorably forgettable". He went on to say: *"A parallel development on the Labour benches has been the rise of former local council leaders who address the Commons as if they were still chairing the sub committee on bus shelters. Even his wife describes Gordon Prentice, Labour MP for Pendle, as "too self effacing". He suffers the additional burden of looking like a more boring younger brother of John Major."*

Embargoed until: 10 May 1994
134/94

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR REFERENDUM ON THE MONARCHY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called for a referendum on the monarchy in a motion appearing in today's House of Commons Order Paper. The MP wants a referendum on whether Britain should remain a constitutional monarchy in its present or in a revised form or whether it should become a republic.

The MP said: "Major constitutional changes are required. The legislature needs reforming. The Commons presents no effective check on the Executive and Parliament no longer protects the fundamental rights of the people - if, indeed, it ever did. I give one example. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill simply dumps the right to silence in the dustbin."

"There is a growing consensus that change is needed. A Bill of Rights, reform of the second chamber and much else besides. But why should the monarchy be ringfenced? Why is it that we all assume Britain will always have a King and Queen who live in palaces, don't pay tax except by virtue of an understanding with the Inland Revenue, get vast cash handouts from Parliament which cannot be reviewed except once in a decade and send their children to super expensive private schools? Does a modern Britain really need this?"

Note to Editors: The MP's Early Day Motion reads: "This House believes a multi-option referendum should be held to determine whether Britain should remain a constitutional monarchy in its present or in a revised and modernised form or whether it should become a republic."

For Immediate Release: 9 May 1994
135/94

TARMAC TO BE QUIZZED BY MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has invited Tarmac bosses to meet him at the House of Commons on Friday week (20 May) in a bid to resolve the impasse over the threatened re-opening of the old cement works at the top of Knotts Lane in Colne. The MP says that if the law allows Tarmac to press ahead against the local community's wishes, the local council's wishes and his own views as the area's MP, then the law is an ass and needs to be changed.

Last month the MP, Gordon Prentice, said he was backing moves by Pendle Council to stop Tarmac turning the residential area into a filthy, dusty and dangerous industrial estate. "Re-opening the plant will mean heavy lorries, laden with cement, trundling up and down Knotts Lane with all the horrible consequences that entails."

Prentice : "I have made my position absolutely clear. I want to see Tarmac go to an industrial site in the Borough where they can't do any harm. Knotts Lane is a residential area and the cement works is a totally inappropriate use."

"I know the Council is currently looking at the possibility of serving a discontinuance order on the company. Obviously, I want the council to do all in its power to protect the beleaguered residents of Knotts Lane."

Note to Editors: A meeting of the Council's Planning Committee on 25 April voted unanimously to defer consideration of a planning application from the company so that further alternatives could be explored.

Under section 102 of the *Town and Country Planning Act* a planning authority may require the discontinuance of use of land, or place conditions on its future use. A discontinuance order can authorise any current use of the land, or give permission for other development on the same land. Discontinuance orders can apply either to lawful or unlawful uses of land. If the use was unlawful, the developer has no right to compensation. For a lawful use, compensation may be payable. (more follows)

Tarmac Meeting

Continuing building and engineering operations are outside the scope of section 102, but a discontinuance order can require the removal or alteration of buildings or plant.

In making a discontinuance order, the local authority is to have regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations. This power cannot, therefore. be exercised on on the grounds of health and safety. Environmental considerations might also be excluded.

If the effect of a discontinuance order is that land cannot be used for any beneficial purpose, the owner can serve a purchase notice on the local authority.

A discontinuance order only takes effect when the Environment Secretary has confirmed it. He may modify the order, and any planning permission granted with it. He may grant some other planning permission. The person on whom the order is served has the right to be heard by the Planning Inspectorate and can insist on a Public Local Inquiry.

For Immediate Release: 9 May 1994
136/94

MPs WELCOME LOCAL AEROSPACE CONSORTIUM TO THE COMMONS

The Consortium of Lancashire Aerospace today unveiled an exhibition at the House of Commons designed to highlight the county's important role in this key industry. Burnley MP, Peter Pike, hosted the event with the exhibition formally being opened by the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Dennis Mendoros, the Earby based aerospace entrepreneur who is chairman of the consortium reminded everyone how important aerospace is to Lancashire - and to the country. Our county produces one quarter of the nation's aerospace output and, so far as I am concerned, we've got to do all we can to maintain Lancashire's pre-eminent position in this leading edge, high tech industry."

"Unfortunately, I thought the speech from the President of the Board of Trade did not live up to its billing. It was bland and complacent and did not address

any of the key recommendations made by the Commons Trade and Industry Committee in July of last year on the British aerospace industry."

"In October 1993, the Committee published its fourth special report on the industry and said this: "We do not consider that the Government's response (to the July report) goes far enough to address our recommendations and the evidence and arguments on which they are based." The Committee made 19 specific recommendations - most of which have tragically been side-lined."

ends

Note to Editors: The following is an extract from the Committee's report

The Trade and Industry Committee has agreed to the following Special Report:

more follows

Lancashire Aerospace

GOVERNMENT OBSERVATIONS ON THE THIRD REPORT FROM THE TRADE AND INDUSTRY COMMITTEE (SESSION 1992-93) ON THE BRITISH AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

1. The Committee published its report on the British Aerospace Industry~ on 21 July 1993. The ., Government's response was received on 18 October and is published as an appendix to this report.

2. We do not consider that the Government response goes far enough to address our ~ I recommendations and the evidence and arguments on which they are based. We note here what we regard as the three most important deficiencies.

3. We recommended that the Government set out in much greater detail than hitherto the overall policy framework and view of the Industry's future which it intends to guide individual decisions affecting the UK's aerospace industry. Our objective was not to increase the Government's already substantial role in the industry, but to ensure more consistent government decision-making across departmental boundaries, so that limited resources would be used to best effect and the industry would have a clearer idea of what to expect from the Government. In response, the Government does little more than describe its existing practice,~ the results of which we discussed and criticised in our report. It is particularly disappointing that there has been no serious reconsideration of the MoD's procurement practices in response to recommendations 13 and 16 and paragraph 116(i) and (v) of our report.

4. We recommended that the Government's response to the National Strategic Technology Acquisition Plan (NSTAP) "should include a full assessment of the expenditure on R & TA (research and technology acquisltion) which it believes is needed to maintain the industry's technological competitiveness". It is not clear from the Government's response whether this will be done, nor how soon. The Government states that "priorities must be set between the various demands of industry and the economy as a whole", but we do not believe that priorities can be set in a rational way unless the extent of the various needs is known.

5. The Minister for Industry has announced that the DTI will adopt the technological priorities identified in NSTAP. However, the response notes that "the Government is using the priorities set out in the NSTAP as the basis of our arguments for a greater role for aerospace research in the EC's Framework 4 programme." A crucial purpose of NSTAP was to distinguish between the technologies on which the UK industry's future technological competitiveness would depend, and which should therefore be pursued by the UK on its own, and those which were less fundamental to the UK industry's future, and which could therefore be pursued through international collaboration. It is not clear from the Government response in what way the priorities set out in NSTAP are being used as part of a case for an increased EC role in aerospace research, and we will be seeking clarification on this point.

6. We stated among our conclusions that "the Government's response to our report will give as clear an indication as could be wished of the degree to

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which its stated commitment to manufacturing industry is to be translated into action." The evidence provided by the response is a useful beginning. We therefore press the Government for further thorough consideration of the issues raised by our report.

For Immediate Release: 11 May 1994
137/94

HARTLEY HOSPITAL SALE GOES AHEAD

The sale of Hartley Hospital is to go ahead to a mystery buyer with the completion of the deal scheduled for the end of this month. According to the Regional Chairman of the newly formed North West Regional Health Authority, Sir Donald Wilson, contracts have now been exchanged and he sees no reason not to proceed.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who is refusing to take the matter lying down, has repeated his demand for sight of the valuation report from the District Valuer in Burnley which was sent on 8 February to Sir Bruce Martin, the chairman of the former North Western Regional Health Authority (which merged with Merseyside on 1 April 1994 to form the new North West RHA).

The MP said: "The valuation report is absolutely central to all this. I am deeply dissatisfied with the way in which this whole business has been handled by the health authority. From the moment I raised the matter in the Commons I have had to extract information out of them. It's like pulling teeth."

The MP said: "I discovered a few weeks ago that the Department of Health - in a secret move never made public until I prised it from them - "untied" nine Regional Health Authorities from the requirement to take advice from the District Valuer before selling surplus NHS property. It was left to the "untied" RHAs themselves to decide the value of what they are trying to sell - unless, I now know, the value appeared to be more than £5 million, in which case the District Valuer should still be involved. I have just chiselled this last nugget of

information from the Health Minister, Tom Sackville - the man who replied on behalf of the Government to my Adjournment debate."

"I have also asked Sir Donald to let me know who has bought the hospital and for how much - but this is probably classified information. We desperately need an open and accountable NHS."

For Immediate Release: 11 May 1994
138/94

MP ATTACKS " SIDELINING" OF LANCASHIRE FIRE BRIGADE

Proposals to transfer responsibility for fire safety from the Fire Brigade to local authority building control departments have been condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice. He describes the plans as " bizarre " .

The proposal, which emerged from the Government's deregulation initiative, is one of a number designed to "cut red tape" while allegedly retaining safety standards and protection for the public.

The MP told the House of Commons in yesterday's Report Stage of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill that the fire service had been treated in an "absolutely shameful way". The Government Task Force set up to consider the matter was packed with industrialists and business people from companies such as Bovis that contribute to Tory Party coffers but, astonishingly, the fire service was not represented - or even invited to give evidence."

The MP told the House: "It seems self evident that the people who risk their lives to put out fires, the people who 24 hours a day live, breath and think about the complex issues involving fire and fire prevention should not be sidelined in this way. The fire brigade, not only in Lancashire but all over the country, has the knowledge, the skill and the practical experience of how fires behave and how people react in a fire. Yet that is to count for nothing."

"The Government's game plan is to move responsibility for fire safety from the fire brigade, where it has rested since 1961, to council building control departments which, themselves, could be transferred lock, stock and barrel to the private sector under the terms of this Bill. The whole thing is simply incredible."

Note to Editors: Lancashire Fire Brigade carried out 40,000 inspections last year yet has received only two complaints since 1991.

139/94
Embargoed: Friday 20 May 1994

John Smith QC MP

Today (Friday 20 May) I shall be in Edinburgh at the funeral of John Smith. I know the sense of sadness I feel is shared by everyone whatever their political leanings. It is a tribute to the man that his death could have so united the entire nation in grief. I believe John Smith was the greatest Prime Minister we never had.

I first heard the news in the Commons tearoom while I was having a light breakfast. First reports were simply that he had been taken ill but we suspected the worst. It must have been about 9.30am when we heard from the whips that he was dead and a dreadful gloom descended. As MPs drifted into the tearoom and heard the news there were gasps of disbelief.

I say often enough to my colleagues in the Labour Party that politics is a rough old trade and to the victor goes the spoils. But Smith was generous to those MPs like me who voted against him in the leadership election two years ago. I was already well aware of his legendary forensic skills in debate but, as an MP, I saw him at close hand and I was impressed. The quick brain. The devastating use of wit and ridicule. His mastery of the House of Commons.

But I saw another side of him not always appreciated or understood by people outside the closed world of Westminster. Smith was free with his time and was always ready to offer advice to those like me who were new MPs. He was a great raconteur and had an inexhaustible supply of amusing tales from the courts (from his days as an advocate in Scotland) and from Westminster. He was really good fun to be with.

Smith made people feel completely at ease. He was supremely confident in his own ability without having any arrogance at all. He was warm and open and made a point of bringing people with him. He was a great unifying force who taught the Party how

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critically important it is to keep together and not split into factions - a lesson, I fear, yet to be learnt by the Conservatives.

The Labour Party is about to launch into a new leadership contest. I know it will be conducted fairly and without rancour. John Smith showed us the prize. The dog has seen the rabbit and after 15 long years in opposition we all yearn for the opportunity to serve the country in Government. That is his legacy and it will not be squandered.

Gordon Prentice MP

Embargoed: 21 May 1994
140/94

LABOUR NAILS THE LIES AS EURO CAMPAIGN GETS UNDER WAY

Next month's Euro Elections will be a referendum on John Major and his Government says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP said: "The Conservatives won last time on the back of the lie that they would cut taxes and Labour would massively increase them. We shall not let them lie their way to victory in the European elections as they did in the General Election."

"I remember the letter in The Guardian on 6 April - almost two years to the day after the General Election- from a D. Bartram of High Wycombe. He said: *"The Tories are absolutely correct. They said at the 1992 election if people*

voted Labour they would pay a lot more in taxation. I voted Labour - and I am paying a lot more in taxation."

"Labour will be fighting these elections on the positive theme that Britain must be at the centre of Europe creating policies that are in Britain's interests."

"The Liberal Democrats have a totally unprincipled approach to Europe - as they do with issues of domestic policy. Last year, Paddy Ashdown was against the Social Chapter. Now he is in favour. What they really want, of course, is a federal European superstate."

"Because they have nothing positive to say on Europe, the Tories will concentrate on telling lies about the Labour Party. That is as certain as night follows day."

Note to Editors: Here are the six lies we anticipate the Tories will deploy against us:

LIE ONE - LABOUR WOULD GIVE UP OUR POWER OF VETO. That is nonsense. We totally defend the right of Britain to maintain our veto on matters of taxation and the European Budget, on defence and on foreign policy. General agreement and majority voting are the norm already, and we believe this should remain the case. But the Tories will lie and accuse us of

an abandonment of the veto. Waste no time in rejecting this. Our Manifesto makes our position clear.

LIE TWO - THE SOCIAL CHAPTER WOULD LOSE JOBS IN BRITAIN. That is nonsense. The Tories do not want the Social Chapter because they want to run a sweat shop economy of the type rejected by the rest of the European Union. Not only the other eleven governments of the Community support the Social Chapter, but so do the four governments, with strong economies, which will join under enlargement. The fact is that what is good enough for working people in the rest of Europe is felt by this Tory government to be too good for the people of Britain. It is still true that the only other party to share the Tory view on the Social Chapter is the French Neo-fascist party.

LIE THREE - LABOUR WILL INTRODUCE A 35 HOUR WEEK AND THEREFORE CUT WAGES. That is a lie. We have made it clear that the 35 hour week is solely for agreement between employers and employees. It is not a subject for legislation and the Labour Party will not enforce a 35 hour week. Of course, this will not prevent the Tories from repeating the lie. This too is spelled out in our Manifesto.

LIE FOUR - LABOUR IS IN FAVOUR OF BUREAUCRATS RUNNING EUROPE. After fifteen years in power, the Tories must be held directly responsible for any increase in bureaucratic power in the Union. Labour supports greater powers for the democratically elected European Parliament but the Tories do not. As usual, they say one thing but support another. They have failed to fundamentally tackle the CAP and failed to tackle widespread fraud in Europe.

LIE FIVE - LABOUR IS FEDERALIST AND WANTS A CENTRALISED EUROPE. This is rich coming from a government which has abolished powers for local government, set up thousands of unaccountable quangos and been the most

centralised government in Britain this century. We are the devolving party. We want power devolved downwards both in Europe and in Britain. If the government is so keen on subsidiarity, why do they not practice it at home?

LIE SIX - LABOUR IS COMMITTED TO THE HARMONISATION OF TAX POLICIES IN EUROPE. This is completely untrue. The Tories tell this lie in an attempt to deflect attention from their imposition of the largest tax hikes in British history. They promised in their last EuroManifesto to 'retain zero-rating on domestic fuel and power'. "We stand by that pledge; we will honour it" (p.32). The Tories cannot be trusted on tax. They lie about their own intentions and they lie about our policies.

For Immediate Release: 17 May 1994
141/94

GOVERNMENT MUST ACT ON SEAT BELTS says PENDLE MP

The crash on the A59 at the weekend resulting in the tragic death of two cub scouts from the Crosshills Pack and an adult was an accident waiting to happen according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

He said: "We feel terrible about what happened and our deepest sympathy goes to the bereaved families in North Yorkshire, just over the border from my own constituency."

"Besides feeling upset, I also feel exasperated as I have frequently raised the issue of seat belts with Ministers but I've got precisely nowhere. In September of last year I wrote to the Transport Secretary to tell him I believed seat belts should be fitted to all mini buses. The Roads Minister, Robert Key, told me on 20 October 1993 *"Many thousands of children travel to school each day in coaches, buses and minibuses, which remain the safest form, of road transport in this country, considerably safer in fact than other means of transport, including private cars. The local education authority, or governing body of a school, can stipulate that all buses used should have seat belts, but in reality few do so."*

In December I asked the Transport Secretary what estimates he had made of the number of school mini-buses in Lancashire and in Great Britain not fitted with seat belts and he told me the information was not available. In January this year I asked the Education Secretary if he would make additional resources available to schools to allow them to offset the cost of fitting seat belts to their school transport and I was told that was a matter on which each local authority needs to assess its priorities for the use of the resources available."

"Then in February I heard again from the Roads Minister in response to an earlier letter of mine urging the Government to underwrite the cost of fitting seat belts and I was told: *"Before we could make seat belts obligatory for all seats in these vehicles, we would have to persuade other EC countries of the need because a change in the structure of any vehicle is governed by the conditions of the single market. To date, however, there has not been the support necessary from EC Member States for the Commission successfully to make seat belt fitment all all seats a mandatory requirement."*

The Minister went on to tell me: "We are currently reviewing the full technical and cost implications of seat belts in these vehicles. Until this review is complete and we have had full reports on the recent tragic accidents we feel that it would not be wise to consider making further regulations in this area."

The MP said: "This simply is not good enough. How many more of these terrible accidents have got to happen before something is done."

ends

Note to Editors:

(1) The Labour Party has been running a Safety in transit campaign. These are the key points:

• Installing and wearing of seat belts in coaches and minibuses to be compulsory. New and tougher regulation of internal design and seat layout to be thrashed out with operators of coaches and minibuses.

• Training and testing of coach and minibus drivers to be made compulsory. Local registers of licensed drivers to be collated and available for public inspection. Specific licensing system to be determined after talks with the voluntary and educational sectors.

• End of the 'three for two' rule for children in large seats.

• Compulsory fitting of fuel tank cut-off devices and electrical system cut-off devices in all new coaches and minibuses.

• Voluntary operated minibuses to be required to take full Public Service Vehicle MOT tests.

• Discussions to be held with insurance industry to provide incentives for upgrading of existing buses, coaches and minibuses.

• Discussions to be held with motoring organisations, consumer groups and motorway users before introducing improvements in service area provision, rest/picnic areas, motorway lighting and information systems and roadworks.

(2) Background information: Recent accidents on British motorways have highlighted the need for increased coach and minibus safety. Their design, layout and maintenance, together with driver training and testing, are

inadequately regulated. Yet their passengers are likely to include the most vulnerable social groups, including children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT: The present regulations controlling the design and layout of minibuses are inadequate. Well designed minibuses have good seating complete with three-point seatbelts, easy access to and from seats and doors, well upholstered interiors and all subject to regular inspection and maintenance. In contrast, some other minibuses have a 'crew bus' layout with bench seats parallel to the sides, no seat belts, a bare metal interior and no

adequate inspection. The worst must be brought up to the standard of the best. This can only be done by Government regulation.

SEATBELTS: At present, it is compulsory to install and wear seat belts in the front seats of minibuses and coaches, but not elsewhere in the vehicle. A major cause of injuries and deaths comes from passengers being thrown out of their seats, on to the seat in front, or out of the vehicle altogether. In one incident, a child was killed when she was thrown out of the back of a minibus, across the central reservation and into the path of oncoming traffic. At present, three children under 14 years of age are allowed to share two seats. This unsafe practice must be stopped.

Most safety experts agree that compulsory wearing of seatbelts to restrain the passenger in the seat will lead to fewer deaths and less serious injuries. The Government has not succeeded in getting EC agreement to the compulsory installation and wearing of seatbelts on coaches and minibuses. They need to try harder.

DRIVER TRAINING AND LICENSING: At present, anyone over 21 years of age who holds a current driving licence can drive a minibus with up to 17 passengers. Yet driving minibuses is a more complex, stressful and responsible task than driving the standard family car. Trials show that even basic driver assessment and training will reduce the likelihood of accidents. In one local authority area where basic driver assessment, training and regular rechecking was implemented, there was a 70 per cent reduction in repair costs over a three year period.

Proper regulation to require the training and testing of volunteer drivers would undoubtedly reduce the number of accidents. Goodwill is no substitute for safe performance.

For Immediate Release: 18 May 1994
143/94

PENDLE JOBLESS DIPS

The unemployment figures for April, released today, show a dip in the area's jobless rate. There were 2,889 people looking for work and claiming unemployment benefit that month compared with 2,960 in March. The rate has fallen from 7.9% to 7.7%. Vacancies at Colne and Nelson Job Centres are also up.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "We have yet to see a steady and sustained fall in unemployment in Pendle. For the past three years the figures have fluctuated around the 2,900 mark."

"In November 1990 when John Major took over as Prime Minister there were 1,708 people out of work in Pendle and claiming benefit. His premiership, which has been characterised by a whole series of economic policy gaffes including the ERM fiasco in September 1992, is chiefly responsible for the sharp rise in the jobless total in Pendle."

For Immediate Release: 18 May 1994
144/94

MP SLAMS POST OFFICE SELL OFF

News today that the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, wants to sell 51% of the Royal Mail and Parcelforce to the private sector has horrified Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"I have a close and continuing interest in the Post Office. It is a highly regarded national institution which, quite literally, delivers the goods. For the Tories, the national interest comes a poor second to their own interest - their re-election. The Tories want to flog it off for £1 billion which they hope will help finance tax cuts just before the next General Election."

"On 12 May I asked the President of the Board of Trade when he was likely to complete his review of the Post Office. I received an answer yesterday, 17 May, from his Ministerial colleague, Patrick McLoughlin, which told me the President would announce the outcome of the review when decisions have been taken and that he would "not set an artificial date."

"Precisely 12 hours later I heard Michael Heseltine tell the nation on the BBC's Today programme that he wanted to privatise the Royal Mail by selling a majority stake to the private sector. Why on earth did they waste paper on this reply to my Parliamentary Question. They should have invited me to tune into the Today programme instead."

For Immediate Release: 18 May 1994
145/94

ARE REFERENDA "TWADDLE"?

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, received the briefest of brief answers in the Commons today in response to his question to Environment Ministers on local referenda. The MP wanted to know the Government's views on whether the use of local referenda should be encouraged. Environment Minister, Tony Baldry, said the question was "twaddle" and sat down.

The MP said afterwards: "I was obviously disappointed at the reply! Clearly, the Conservatives only discuss referenda when they think it can be used at national level, say, on the single currency issue, and where they think it will get them out of a hole."

"The fact is that local referenda are commonplace across Europe and they can enrich and encourage public debate. Here in Britain after 15 years of Conservative Government, local authorities have lost powers, functions and, for many people, relevance. Local referenda (which can be used by Parish Councils) could breathe new life into local democracy."

"The state of health of local government is alarming. All the political parties are finding it increasingly difficult to persuade people to stand for election. And turnout has been falling. In the Metropolitan Boroughs voter turnout has fallen from 46.2% in 1990 to 32.5% in 1992. Over the same period in the shire districts turnout fell from 48.6% to 37.8%. In the English Counties turnout fell from 39.2% in 1989 to 37.2% last year."

"We heard all this stuff today from Government Ministers about *"passing power to the people"*. I simply do not know how they have the brass neck to say such things."

For Immediate Release: 19 May 1994
146/94

HARTLEY HOSPITAL'S MYSTERY BUYERS EMERGE FROM THE SHADOWS

The Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority, Sir Donald Wilson, has revealed the identity of the mystery buyers of Hartley Hospital in Colne. Sir Donald has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, the buyers are Ribble Industrial Estates, Simonstone Business Park, Blackburn Road, Simonstone, Burnley BB12 7NJ.

The RHA chief refused to give the MP sight of the District Valuer's valuation of the hospital which, he says, was provided to the Regional Health Authority in confidence.

The MP said: "This is the end of a chapter but it is not, by any means, an end to the story. Ribble Industrial Estates is not a limited company. I believe it is linked in some way to Barnfield Construction but full details will emerge in due course."

"I do not know what the new buyers hope to do with this hospital but if, as I suspect, they cannot get planning permission for some kind of residential development they may well have bought a pig in a poke."

For Immediate Release: 24 May 1994
148/94

STOCKS BECK TO GET A CLEAN UP

Stocks Beck at Barnoldswick is to be cleaned up - but it is unlikely to happen before 1998 according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. Last year, the MP unleashed a storm of outrage when he revealed the clean up of this polluted beck downstream of Barnoldswick Sewage Works could possibly have to wait until 2005.

The Government has now announced the designation of sensitive areas for priority clean up and the River Ribble has been included. This means that North West Water will have to include further treatment to remove phosphates from the effluent from the sewage works by 1998.

The MP commented: "1998 is still a long way off but at least something will be happening this side of the millenium. Clearly, the pressure of public opinion had some effect. The National Rivers Authority has told me they will be having urgent discussions with North West Water about the work that will be needed. The NRA tells me that the water regulator, OFWAT, will not press for the work to be completed much before 1998."

"I am obviously concerned that everything is done as quickly as possible. I shall be keeping in close touch with the NRA."

ends

Note to Editors: Last November the National Rivers Authority - the water quality watchdog - called on members of the public *"to take a close look at the water environment and report incidents such as pollution, poaching and flooding".* Calls can be made on their new "national emergency" freephone number : 0800 807060 and report any incidents.

For Immediate Release: 24 May 1994
148/94

MP PLEDGES "CAMPAIGN OF THE CENTURY" IN BID TO STOP POST OFFICE PRIVATISATION

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has warned the Government to expect the "campaign of the century" to prevent the planned Post Office sell off announced by the President of the Board of Trade last week. The MP said: "The family silver is almost gone and the Post Office is the last remaining canteen of cutlery which is now being polished up for the auctioneer."

"Last week we were told by the President of the Board of Trade that the privatisation plans had been leaked to the press but Mr Heseltine didn't deny his preference which was to sell 51% of the Royal Mail and Parcelforce to the private sector and re-name the organisation - Royal Mail plc! I believe all this talk of a leak is bogus and that the President was simply testing the water and gauging the reaction to his proposal."

"In any event, I have asked the Prime Minister to initiate an inquiry into the source of the leak but I'd bet a book of first class stamps that nothing comes out of it."

"Michael Heseltine would privatise his granny given half a chance."

ends

Note to Editors: The following briefing has been circulated to MPs by the Union of Communication Workers. It sets out the reasons why the union believes the integrated publicly owned Post Office should be maintained:

1. There has been a flurry of media speculation suggesting that the review of the Post Office, conducted by the DTI, will result in proposals to break up the Business - selling off Royal Mail and Parcelforce as one company and keeping Counters in the Public Sector. Some reports indicate that a share in the privatised elements will be maintained by the Government.

This brief document sets out some of the many reasons why the only sensible way forward for the Business is for it to remain in the Public

Sector as an integrated network but with commercial and financial constraints relaxed and, in some cases, removed.

2. First, it is pertinent to point out that the British people who have always owned the Post Office, were never given the opportunity to debate privatisation. It was not contained in any Party Manifesto at the last election.

If the review were to propose any changes necessitating legislation, a Green Paper should be published with any final decision made after the next General Election.

3. A succession of opinion polls have demonstrated how highly the Post Office is regarded and how fiercely privatisation and/or separation is opposed by the British public.

To summarise some of the most recent findings:-

A Taylor Nelson Research Report published in the 'Financial Times' on 10th December 1992 found that 82% of the public are satisfied with the way Royal Mail is run (compared to 31% for British Airways for example).

• A Mori Poll in November 1992 found that 64% opposed privatisation.

• A further Mori Poll in March 1994 found that 68% opposed privatisation including 53% of Conservative voters.

• The same poll discovered that 81% of the public wanted the Post Office to remain in the Public Sector but with more powers to develop and expand services.

• An Independent ORC Poll for the Post Office in April 1994 found that 90% had a "great deal" of confidence in the Post Office and 77% agreed that the Business ought to be kept together as an integrated network.

4. No country in the world has privatised its postal services. Those administrations which have freedom to compete for domestic and international traffic are publicly owned.

The Dutch are most often quoted as an example of a postal service which is moving toward privatisation. This may change following the recent elections but in any case, it must be emphasised that the British have the most to lose from such experiments.

There are 11 deliveries a week in London but only 5 in Amsterdam.
The proposals for privatising the Dutch Post Office preserve public control because the Government are not allowed to sell more than 49% of the shares. It will also be maintained as an integrated service - Counters will not be separated from the rest of the Business.

5. As mentioned, no other postal service in the world has privatised its postal service but some have experimented with the kind of market forces that privatisation will lead to. In New Zealand, the Government own 100% of the shares in the Post Office. Nevertheless, the interference with the Post Office by the Conservative Government and its conversion to a State owned

enterprise, has led to rapid deterioration of services, particularly for rural customers.

In 1987 when the new enterprise was introduced, tariffs increased by 33% for all and 166% for some, mainly in rural locations. They increased by a further 25% in 1990 and rural customers now have to collect their post from central locations.

Even the Select Committee Report (from a Conservative dominated body) points out that whilst the State owned enterprise was due to culminate in complete privatisation, "political considerations
have delayed a decision on this issue".

It also states that "Government has drawn back from further deregulation because of public concern".

The retention by Government of a substantial share in the Business whether 49% or 51% would not protect services.

Currently, the Post Office is publicly accountable through Parliament. It is this public accountability that ensures that:-

• two deliveries a day are provided in town areas from Monday to Friday (with one everywhere on Saturdays). One letter delivery would be more cost effective. Only public ownership has prevented the Post Office from abolishing the second delivery.

• a cross-subsidy is provided to keep less viable post offices running, amounting to £30 million per annum.

• Royal Mail operates 180 Post Buses providing the only form of transport in many areas. 80% of these routes have to be subsidised.

• the Post Office foregoes an estimated £2 million in revenue to provide the Articles for the Blind Service.

• Parcelforce has VAT exemption. Tariffs would increase by 17% as a result of privatisation. This would have a particularly devastating affect on charities that are frequent users of Parcelforce but cannot reclaim VAT.

7. Private profit will understandably become paramount in a company paying dividends to shareholders. Not only will the services and facilities mentioned above be jeopardised, the geographical cross-subsidy that underpins the principle of universal service at a uniform tariff is bound to become more vulnerable. With a Post Office placed beyond democratic public influence, such changes will adversely affect communities throughout the country.

8. The Post Office does not operate on huge profit margins. Profit is usually only 5% of gross turnover. The Counters network is vulnerable because of its reliance on work conducted on behalf of the State (70% of transactions).
Royal Mail relies heavily on advertising mail for revenue and volume. To ensure that the current universal service is provided,~;~ complete network has to function regardless of how many items are in the system.

Public ownership is necessary to safeguard vital services in such an uncertain climate.

9. According to the more recent media speculation, there is an option under consideration whereby Counters would remain in the Public Sector with Royal Mail and Parcelforce sold off as a single company. This is a particularly worrying prospect.

The three main Post Office Businesses (Post Office Counters Ltd., Royal Mail and Parcelforce) are interdependent. The recent Trade & Industry Committee Report (which did not pronounce on ownership) stated that "no other postal service in the world detaches itself from its parcel delivery", as an argument to keep Royal Mail and Parcelforce together.

Equally, no other postal service in the world would detach its Counters services. Not only would this break up the Post Office and create a new Public Sector minnow, it would jeopardise Counters Services because they rely so heavily on income guaranteed from the rest of the Business.

The main problem in the Counters Business is its inability to offer new services such as travel, ticketing and financial services because of restrictions imposed by Government. Under this proposal, Counters either continues to labour under such restrictions because it remains in the Public Sector or the restrictions are removed, which suggests they can be removed for Royal Mail and Parcelforce also without the drastic and destructive step of privatisation.

10. When the DTI Review was launched, it was made clear that there was no pre-determined outcome and that continued public ownership was an option. All of the evidence suggests that the Post Office should be left to grow in the culture that made it successful.

It is suggested there are now three alternatives under consideration which are:-

• retention of the Post Office as an integrated network in the Public Sector with much greater commercial freedom.

• splitting Royal Mail and Parcelforce away to form one company with 51% of shares privately owned. Counters to remain in the Public Sector.

• privatising the whole of the Post Office.

The Business, the public and the workforce are united on the first alternative. We believe any other option will lead to a serious deterioration of service and will be unacceptable to the British public.

For Immediate Release: 24 May 1994
149/94

PENDLE'S DISABLED "FURIOUS" AS CIVIL RIGHTS BILL IS SCUPPERED

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blown a fuse over the Government's "shabby and disgraceful" treatment of people with disabilities. The MP renewed his call

for the resignation of Social Security Minister, Nicholas Scott, accusing him of betraying the hopes of people with disabilities.

The MP said: "My postbag has been bulging over recent days as people in Pendle have voiced their anger and frustration at the Government's duplicity in sinking the Civil Rights Bill."

"What has happened over this vitally important Bill must rank as the low point even for this Government of sleaze and intrigue. A Minister conspires with other Conservative Members of Parliament to mislead the House, misuses public funds to covertly table wrecking amendments and then lies to the House in an attempt to cover-up his deceit."

"This is exactly the kind of conduct that John Major assured us he would not condone. He wrote on April 5th that: "*It is clearly of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to the House. If they knowingly fail to do this, then they should relinquish their positions except in quite exceptional circumstances. of which a devaluation or time of war or other danger to national security have been quoted as examples."*

"This is the worst case of misleading the House of Commons since the Profumo Affair. People with disabilities are seething that Nicholas Scott, the man who publicly professed to be their champion was privately plotting to destroy their Civil Rights Bill. This issue will not go away."

Note to Editors: Sequence of events leading to the debating of amendments on Friday May 6th 1994.

more follows

Civil Rights Bill

March 11th 1994 - Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill receives its Second Reading in the House of Commons; Ayes 231, Noes 0.

March 30th 1994 - First sitting of Standing Committee C. No Government amendments tabled.

April 12th 1994 - In an answer to Mr Austin-Walker (Woolwich), the Prime Minister indicates that he and the Government, *"share the aim of eliminating discrimination against disabled people."*

He adds that, *"What we need to do in Committee and thereafter is to look at the practical implications of the Bill and that will be done."*

April 12th 1994 - Second and Third sittings of Standing Committee C. No Government amendments.

April 13th 1994 - Fourth sitting of Standing Committee C. No Government amendments.

April 28th 1994 - In an answer to Ms Lynne (Rochdale) the Leader of the House declines to make further time available for discussion of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

April 29th 1994 - Debate on Sir John Hannam's (Exeter) Private Member's motion that *"...Her Majesty's Ministers should provide sufficient time on the floor of the House before 27th May 1994 to allow all remaining stages of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to be completed".*

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr Scott, Chelsea) refers to the Bill and its progress during Committee, *"I acknowledge that we are addressing a deeply serious issue today and that we will be addressing it again next Friday. We discussed it on Second Reading and in Committee with considerable seriousness. The issue affects the lives of millions of our fellow citizens and it affects society as a whole because of its potential impact on the quality of life of many disabled people and the way in which society addresses their needs and abilities."*

He adds *"It has already been said that on Second Reading on 11 March, I reaffirmed the undertaking given by the Prime Minister that the Bill would be examined and discussed thoroughly in Committee. It has been acknowledged by my hon. Friend and the hon Member for Kingswood that we fulfilled that commitment in Committee. We thoroughly examined and discussed the issues involved in eliminating discrimination against disabled people against a range of amendments and discussions of the clauses in the Bill."*

May 3rd 1994 - Conservative backbenchers table 80 amendments to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

May 6th 1994 - In reply to a written question from Mr Alf Morris (Manchester Wythenshawe), the Leader of the House admits that the amendments to the Bill had been drafted by Parliamentary Counsel.

more follows

Civil Rights Bill

During the debate on the Report stage of the Bill, the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People denies that the Government is behind the amendments, and tells the House that his department, *"had no part in the drafting of any of the amendments and, to the best of my knowledge, nobody in my Department has been involved in the drafting of any amendments in this area."*

May 9th 1994 - In a reply to a written question to Mr Alf Morris, the Leader of the House states that, *"The Office of Parliamentary Counsel does not offer facilities to hon Members except at the request of Ministers."*

Mr Scott writes to Mr Campbell-Savours to explain the discrepancies between his statement to the House and the details relating to the use of Parliamentary Counsel given by the Leader of the House.

For Immediate Release: 24 May 1994
150/94

GOVERNMENT POLICIES "DRIVING UK plc OUT OF BUSINESS" says PENDLE MP

On the day the Government unveiled its plans to improve the nation's competitiveness, (Tuesday 24 May) Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, launched a scathing attack on the Government's track record. "For Michael Heseltine to come to the despatch box as the champion of British industry is a sick joke. The Conservatives have had 15 years at the helm. How much longer do they need to turn things around?"

"Michael Heseltine is the man who closed down the coal industry and sold off the British car industry and is doing precious little to support our aerospace industry. The facts incontestably show that after 15 years of Conservative Government, the nation has slipped back on almost every measure when compared with our competitors."

The MP continued: "Since the Conservatives came to power in 1979, the UK has grown less than every other EC country except Greece.*(source: OECD, 1994)* In 1979, British people were wealthier on average than the rest of Europe. After 15 years of Tory rule, despite the benefit of North Sea oil, we are now worse off." (EU *annual report, 1994).*

"Official estimates from the European Commission predict that by next year the UK economy will again be lagging behind in Europe." *(source: EU Economic Forecast, Spring 1994).* And the most recent figures show that since the Tories came to power exports from the UK have grown less than any other European country." *(source: Eurostat External Trade Statistical Yearbook).*

"Despite working on average three hours longer per week than the rest of Europe, the UK is in the bottom half of the European productivity league table." *(source: Industrial Policy in European Countries, 1993).*

more follows

"Since the Tories came to power, the UK has had the slowest rate of increase in jobs of any of the European twelve, apart from Spain. To be lectured by the people responsible for our industrial decline and for this catalogue of misery really takes the biscuit"

For Immediate Release: 25 May 1994
151/94

MP QUERIES BUYERS' PLANS FOR HARTLEY HOSPITAL

The future of Hartley Hospital in Colne is again under the microscope following confirmation last week that the buildings and grounds have been sold to Ribble Industrial Estates based in Simonstone. A report in the Lancashire Evening Telegraph on May 20 unmasked local businesspeople Tim Webber and Chris Holgate of Barnfield Construction, Howard Rigg of Pendle Industrial Services and Ken Ingham of Travis Engineering as the mystery names behind the controversial purchase. The precise nature of Ribble Industrial Estates is uncertain. It is not a limited company.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I see from press reports that the new owners are apparently determined to restore the building and let it as a hospital or

nursing home with 80 to 100 beds. I wish them well although I do not believe for one moment it will turn out this way. I hope I am proved wrong."

"The main players seem to be Barnfield Construction who are property developers and builders. The company has three directors, Tim Webber (who is also a director of Barnfield Homes Ltd, Barnfield Quality Homes Ltd, PSL Marketing Services Ltd and AJF Restaurants Ltd), Sheila Webber and Chris Holgate (who is also a director of Barnfield Homes Ltd and Barnfield Quality Homes Ltd).

The MP added: "I am waiting for confirmation of the hospital's sale price from Sir Donald Wilson, the chairman of the North Western Regional Health Authority. I have also asked the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy for valuation reports relating to the disposal of surplus NHS land and property to be made available for public inspection after the sale has been concluded. I do this as Sir Donald refuses to let me have sight of this report which I consider to be key to the whole affair."

For Immediate Release: 26 May 1994
152/94

PROFITS FLOODING INTO NORTH WEST WATER

News that the privatised utility North West Water has increased pre-tax profits from £247m to £269m means there is little excuse for the company to defer much needed improvement work in the Pendle area according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "The headlines last year were dominated by the colossal pay increases board members of North West Water awarded themselves at a time when the infrastructure was springing leaks all over the place. This year I want to see some action to tackle the problems caused by too many years of neglect."

"I want to see the problems at Barrowford sorted out once and for all. Last December, a score of families and more were driven from their homes by a flash flood - one of a number in recent years. I want to see action at Foulridge which is home to the leakiest main in Lancashire. It burst twice in 1988, once in 1991, once in 1992 and no fewer than three times in 1993. And I want to see action taken to clean up Stocks Beck at Barnoldswick and sooner rather than later."

"These issues have been in my in-tray for months and I want to see them dealt with. North West Water's shareholders are doing very well thank you. But the customers have rights too."

ends

Note to Editors: Peggy Hollinger of the Financial Times writes in today's FT
(NW Water ahead of expectations with £269m):
North West Water yesterday said it was comfortable with the initial outcome of the current price review process, as it announced a 9 per cent increase in pretax profits.

Replying to questions over whether North West felt the industry regulator had taken a tough approach to the draft price increases issued at the weekend, Sir Desmond Pitcher, chairman, said: "The logic and methods by which Ian Byatt goes about it leave one with a feeling of comfort."

North West Water profits

The UK's 31 water and sewerage companies are preparing replies for Ofwat on the draft K factors - the rate above inflation by which they will be allowed to raise prices from 1995 to 2000. The final allowances will be announced on July 28. Analysts estimates for North West's increase range from 2 to 2.6.
The utility kicked off the water company results season with better than expected figures, largely due to a reduction from £36m to £12m in provisions for restructuring the regulated business. Pre-tax profits rose from £247m to £269m on turnover up from £878m to £924m.
The increase masked a disappointing performance from the process engineering business, where profits before interest and tax fell from £19.7m to £8.8m.
On the international contract business North West wrote off £8m in investments against £9.6m last time.
The regulated businesses showed a 15 per cent increase in profits before interest and tax to £326m because of reduced working capital and operating efficiencies. A decline in industrial and commercial turnover held back the advance in sales to 6 per cent at £729m.
Gearing fell from 29.1 per cent to 27.3 per cent.
The final dividend is increased to 15.4p for a total 8 per cent higher at 23.07p (21.4p). Earnings rose from 62.3p to 70.8p.

For Immediate Release: 31 May 1994
153/94

LABOUR LEADER CALLS ON CLEVELAND GUEST

Acting Labour Leader, Margaret Beckett, spoke today about the critically important role of manufacturing in the North West which she said was struggling to survive after years of neglect by the Government. She called for a new partnership between industry and Government in a bid to retain key skills in the region.

Mrs Beckett was visiting the Colne precision engineering firm, Cleveland Guest, with local MP Gordon Prentice and Labour's Euro candidate, Mark Hendrick. The firm called in the receiver in November of last year but, fortunately, was rescued after a management buy-out backed by Lancashire Enterprises. The Labour leader toured the factory meeting people on the shop floor and was given an up date on the firm's prospects by the new Chief Executive, Steve Hollis.

Mark Hendrick said afterwards: "This area of Colne has seen a swathe of closures in recent years and we all breathed a sigh of relief when we heard that Cleveland Guest was to be saved as a going concern - albeit with a smaller workforce. The management is determined to diversify into non defence areas and that must be the right strategy."

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, added: "We all wish the firm well. The market conditions in aerospace and engineering generally are not easy but the workforce is highly skilled and highly committed. If this country is serious about retaining a strong manufacturing base we can't afford to allow firms like Cleveland Guest to go to the wall."

For Immediate Release: 1 June 1994
154/94

MP RIDICULES "MEDIEVAL PANTOMIME" OF THE CITY OF LONDON

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for the City of London Corporation to be abolished. He says the adjacent London Boroughs should assume responsibility for running the square mile.

The MP said: "At a time when the Government is turning the structure of local government across the entire country upside down there is one little corner of England forever impervious to change - the City of London."

"From being a faintly amusing medieval pantomime it has become a rip roaring farce with bakers, butchers and candlestick makers vying with the multinational, BP, for control of the City of London Corporation."

The local traders and BP are trying to get as many people as they can onto the City's electoral register before the June 15 closing date for those eligible to vote in this year's elections to the Court of Common Council - the body that runs the Corporation. The meat traders are furious that new Brussels regulations on matters such as refrigerated zones are pushing up rents by up to sixfold as the Corporation tries to recoup the cost of the improvements.

The MP added: "The Court of Common Council is 132 strong but only residents and businesspeople with property rated at more than £10 a year have a vote. The Press reports paint a picture as vivid and as hilarious as a West End farce. Companies which pay 99% of the rates to the Corporation have no vote but BP has discovered that it can grant parking spaces to its employees who will then qualify for resident status and can vote. The butchers are not going to take this lying down and, apparently, 360 of them have registered in one ward."

"The whole set up is simply bizarre."

more follows

City of London "a farce"

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP referred the the country's "creaking and antique" constitution in his first speech in the House of Commons on 13 May 1992. He spoke about the City:

"This Chamber is supposed to be at the heart of our democracy, yet our system of government is a perversion of democracy. Half this building is given over to Members of Parliament who are not elected but who are here by birth or patronage. That is absolutely indefensible. We meet in a capital city with no democratically elected city-wide government yet we tolerate the continued existence of the City of London Corporation which is a cross between Gilbert and Sullivan and a music hall joke. The Lime Street ward, which is one of 25,

has 18 electors. Eight of them belong to the Obertelli family who run a sandwich bar.

Much of Britain's system of government is not just Victorian but feudal. It needs massively updating to make it relevant to the 21st century...."

For Immediate Release: 1 June 1994
155/94

MP URGES COUNCIL TO STICK TO ITS GUNS OVER CEMENT WORKS

The controversial proposal by the construction giant, Tarmac, to re-open the old cement works at Knotts Lane in Colne is back on the agenda of Pendle Council this evening and local MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging councillors to stick to their guns. He said: "The only thing that has changed over recent weeks is the political control of the authority - now run by a Liberal/Conservative coalition. Before the election, no-one wanted the cements works to re-open and blight the entire area and no-one should concede that now."

"I have read the report going to the Development, Highways and Transport Committee this evening and I cannot understand for the life of me why the Director of Development Services is recommending that no action be taken on the Discontinuance Notice which would prevent Tarmac from re-opening the site. If this is accepted, the Council will be showing its hand to the company just when the bidding is about to get serious."

"I am told that Tarmac will not go to Lomeshaye and they want to stay in Colne but the Council says there are no other suitable sites in the area that are available. The officers say they want a negotiated solution that would produce a cleared site available for a residential development. That's good but it is just a statement of intentions without the leverage - and the threat - of the Discontinuance Notice behind it."

"The Council's draft plan includes the site in the Knotts Lane housing proposal and the threatened use makes a mockery of the plan. Parliament has given local authorities powers to intervene and the Council should do so. I don't want this cement works and neither do local people. It's time Tarmac got the message. They should take their trucks, sand and cement elsewhere."

more follows

Tarmac

Note to Editors: Under section 102 of the *Town and Country Planning Act* a planning authority may require the discontinuance of use of land, or place conditions on its future use. A discontinuance order can authorise any current use of the land, or give permission for other development on the same land. Discontinuance orders can apply either to lawful or unlawful uses of land. If the use was unlawful, the developer has no right to compensation. For a lawful use, compensation may be payable.

Continuing building and engineering operations are outside the scope of section 102, but a discontinuance order can require the removal or alteration of buildings or plant.

In making a discontinuance order, the local authority is to have regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations. This power cannot, therefore. be exercised on on the grounds of health and safety. Environmental considerations might also be excluded.

If the effect of a discontinuance order is that land cannot be used for any beneficial purpose, the owner can serve a purchase notice on the local authority.

A discontinuance order only takes effect when the Environment Secretary has confirmed it. He may modify the order, and any planning permission granted with it. He may grant some other planning permission. The person on whom the order is served has the right to be heard by the Planning Inspectorate and can insist on a Public Local Inquiry.

For Immediate Release: 1 June 1994
156/94

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR CAP REFORM

The Common Agricultural Policy costs Britain an arm and a leg and must be urgently reformed says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking in Nelson this week with Labour's Euro candidate, Mark Hendrick.

The MP said: "For every family of four in Pendle, the Common Agricultural Policy means they are spending about £20 a week more than they need do because of higher taxes and higher food prices. The CAP budget has increased by 58% since 1979 and now stands at £30.4 billion. That is money used to keep food prices high, to build up food mountains and to dump cheap food on world markets."

"The grain mountain last weighed in at 19 million tons whilst the olive oil lake brims over at 171,000 tonnes. It cost over £2 billion a year just to store the stuff! The tobacco regime will cost tax-payers throughout Europe £2.5m every day of the year. The Tories have had 15 years on the Council of Agriculture Ministers to sort this mess out but we are still saddled with this madness."

The MP continued: "There must be radical change to bring value for money for the tax-payer and the consumer coupled with effective support for farming and investment in rural communities."

"The CAP is the biggest rip-off ever invented."

Note to Editors: The cost of the CAP has soared. In 1979 the CAP budget was £6.4 billion. In 1994 the budget is £30.4 billion. The CAP accounts for 57% of the European Union budget. In the UK alone, CAP market support will cost £2,592 million in 1994/5 - up over 80% since 1979 after allowing for inflation. This money is spent on the open ended state intervention buying that builds up food mountains, on the set-aside scheme and on the export refunds paid out as we dump our subsidised surpluses on the world market.

Fraud: There were 1,298 reported cases of CAP fraud in 1993 costing £190m. This is even worse than 1992 when 1030 cases were reported worth £88m.

CAP Reform

The number of reported cases is acknowledged to be the tip of the fraud iceberg. In 1993, the UK had the third highest number of reported cases of fraud after Spain and Greece. Inexplicably, the Government only takes 1% of the money allocated to the UK from a European Union anti fraud fund.

Food mountains: The total cost of just storing Europe's food mountains and drink lakes will be £2,242 million this year. In January of this year the grain mountain weighed in at 21,459,000 tonnes, the beef mountain at 430,000 tonnes and the butter mountain at 192,000 tonnes.

Failing farming: The CAP is failing to meet on of the key requirements set down for it in the Treaty of Rome - namely *to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture.* It is the largest farmers and landowners who get the most out of the CAP - the vast proportion of CAP cash still goes to a tiny proportion of farmers.

1992 reforms: The Conservative Government claimed the reformed CAP to be their own creation. Just over a year ago, John Gummer told the House of Commons that he had got rid of the original "MacSharry" proposals to reform the CAP and had replaced them with his own. The Tories tried to take credit for the reformed CAP - now they must take the blame. The 1992 reform did not pretend to tackle the cost to the tax-payer of the CAP - increased expenditure was always envisaged.

Set aside: A major element of the CAP reforms was the imposition of the set aside regime. All but the smallest farmers have to set aside 15% of their arable land in return for which they receive arable area payments. Set- aside will cost tax-payers throughout Europe £1.3 billion in 1994 to pay for over 4 million hectares set-aside.

The UK has set-aside a far higher percentage of its arable land under the arable land scheme than other member states - 14.8% last year - over half a million hectares. Last year's set-aside payments in the UK cost the tax-payer £141 million to date with the full year cost rising to £813 million. Arable area payments to some farmers topped a million pounds.

The Labour Party opposed the set-aside regime from the beginning. It is an expensive supply control measure which delivers no direct benefits to the farmer, consumer, tax-payer or environment. The regime also puts farmworkers on the dole. For every 130 hectares set-aside, one agricultural job is set-aside.

157/94. For Immediate Release: 7 June 1994

GOVERNMENT IS BLOCKING NEW COACH SAFETY LAWS says PENDLE MP

"New laws are desperately needed to improve safety in coaches and mini-buses but the Government is blocking them" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "After a string of terrible accidents - the latest only weeks ago involving cubs from just across the border in North Yorkshire - we need to make our coaches and mini-buses safer. That's not just laws for seat belts, but laws for better design and construction and for a proper system of licensing drivers."

"The Opposition has repeatedly offered to co-operate with the Government in holding urgent talks with all interested organisations and getting improvements into law as quickly as possible. But Ministers, including the Prime Minister, have repeatedly refused to accept our offer."

"Parents and children here in Pendle want reassurance that when they travel by coach or mini-bus they can do so in safety. That's why I am determined to force the Government to act after months of hesitation and prevarication - and a mounting toll of fatalities."

"I am also urging Lancashire Education Authority and all school governing bodies to make sure that local children and other groups only use coaches and mini-buses with seat-belts fitted, with safe internal design and driven by qualified drivers."

"The UK Government claims that it can't take any action to insist on installing seatbelts on all seats unless and until there is agreement at a European wide level. This is not the case. The European Commission has advised that EC Directives merely lay down minimum standards. Member states can have stricter rules of their own."

For Immediate Release: 7 June 1994
158/94

PENDLE MP URGES ACTION TO STOP GENOCIDE IN RWANDA

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing for international action to stop further genocide in Rwanda. He told members of the Pendle Labour Party his postbag was full of letters from local people sickened and horrified by the images over past weeks on their TV screens.

The MP said: "After the UN pulled a large number of their forces out of Rwanda the remaining 270 peacekeepers were unable to fulfil even the limited duties of assisting with humanitarian aid."

"I welcome the adoption by the United Nations of Resolution 918 which allows for the deployment of up to 5500 troops. But let's not ignore the massive obstacles facing the UN as it tried to deliver on the resolution. Troop donor countries are refusing to pledge soldiers to serve in the Rwanda task force without guarantees from the UN of safe conduct and protection from attack by Rwandan government and rebel forces."

"I want to see a major international effort to stop the butchery and the slaughter of innocent people. And we should give immediate additional help to the relief agencies working with the hundreds of thousands of refugees in

Tanzania, Zaire, Burundi and Uganda, all of which are among the poorest countries in the world, struggling to cope with the huge influx of displaced persons."

ends

Note to Editors: David Waller of Oxfam warned last year: "Rwanda stands on the brink of an uncharted abyss of anarchy and violence." Rwanda has gone over the brink and the international community has at times appeared powerless to act.

The Colonial Legacy. It is only one hundred years since the first Europeans set foot in Rwanda, and since the Great Powers of Europe decreed that Rwanda and Burundi should be assigned to Germany in the great carve up of Africa. They were transferred to Belgian control after the 1914-18 war.

When Central Africa was brought under European control, the dominant group within Rwanda was the Tutsi people, who formed a political and military elite. The much more numerous Hutu farmed most of the land. The Twa people (the "Pygmies" of colonial mythology) lived by hunting and gathering in remote forest areas. They account for only 1% of the population.

For most of the colonial period, the Germans and later the Belgians reinforced the powers and privileges of Tutsi chiefs over the Hutu peasants, while removing the chiefs' political independence and therefore their need for the support of their Hutu clients. The relationship Tutsi to Hutu became steadily more exploitative than it had been before and the seeds of later ethnic hatreds were laid.

In the late 1950s the Belgians abruptly changed course. they opted at the last minute to join the process of decolonisation which was already under way in other parts of Africa and saw the Pan Africanism of the existing Tutsi leadership as hostile to western interests. they pushed through a transfer of power to a new Hutu elite, at the expense of the Tutsi traditional rulers, between 1959 and 1962. This revolution led to the first mass killings of Tutsis, and to the flight of over 100,000 Tutsi refugees to neighbouring countries.

The Political Context. Repeated attempts to find a political solution that would allow Tutsi refugees from Rwanda to return home, and yet allay Hutu fears of the return of Tutsi domination, have dominated Rwandan politics for the last thirty years. They have all failed. For most of the same period the traditional Tutsi elite continued to dominate neighbouring Burundi, which has a very similar ethnic mix and the same colonial history as Rwanda. Events in each of these countries have affected the other, and the awful prospect of current events in Rwanda being repeated in Burundi is very real at the present time.

In October 1990 Tutsi refugees in Uganda formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and attacked the Hutu-dominated government forces, beginning the current phase of civil war. In July 1993 Burundi appeared to move in the opposite direction with the democratic election of its first Hutu president, but within three months he had been murdered in an abortive coup by elements in the Tutsi-dominated army. In October and November 1993 hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled their homes in response to the ethnic killings which followed this failed coup attempt, but the holocaust which was feared at that time did not take place.

For three and a half years the civil war in Rwanda took a steady toll. Thousands died in fighting or in massacres sparked by military gains and losses, and hundreds of thousands were displaced from their homes. At the same time the gains made by the RPF strengthened the position of Hutu hard-liners within Rwanda. In particular the Committee for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), and the youth militia associated with it, appeared to enjoy the informal support of President Habyarimana. They took a hard line against not only the Tutsi minority but also those Hutu politicians who wished to find an accommodation between the two communities.

The deaths of Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart on 6th April this year sparked off the current maelstrom of genocidal violence. So far the situation in Burundi has not got out of control, in spite of some fighting between the army and the youth wing of the ruling Hutu party, and another failed coup attempt reported on 22nd May. But in Rwanda the death of Habyarimana sparked off a purge of his political opponents that appears to have been initiated by the Presidential Guard, and quickly escalated into mass pogroms against political opponents from both ethnic communities and against the Tutsi community in general.

The International Response: There were over two thousand UN troops in Rwanda before 6th April, but most of these were hastily withdrawn in response to a unanimous decision of the United Nations Security Council on 21st April. That decision was reversed on 16th May, but by then hundreds of thousands of civilians had been massacred and millions more had been driven from their homes. The latest estimates suggest up to half a million dead in less than two months, and hundreds of thousands ~ore have taken refuge in neighbouring countries which are too poor to feed them without major assistance from the international community.

Much of the killing in Rwanda has been carried out by Government backed Hutu militia: in effect, civilians armed with machetes, clubs and knives. Much of this killing might have been prevented if the UN had taken a different course, and stepped up its military intervention at the critical point in early April. The decision now to send 5,500 troops is undermined by delays in deployment and logistical difficulties. But they do now have a mandate to protect civilians and to support relief operations, so they are better placed to intervene effectively than they were under the original, more limited mandate.

A further effect of the Rwandan slaughter is the threat of ecological disaster in Lake Victoria. The Ugandan Government estimate that forty thousand bodies have floated down river from Rwanda, and are now floating in the lake or being washed up on its shores. Here, as in the refugee camps of Tanzania, Burundi and Zaire, there is a need for massive external assistance to contain the short term effects of the events in Rwanda itself.

The British Government backed the UN decision to cut its presence to a few hundred troops at the critical point in April, and has since failed to justify that decision. Britain has given limited funds of around four million pounds since 6th April, much of it channelled through non-governmental organisations. In response to a challenge by Tom Clarke to find new funds for the Rwanda emergency, Overseas Development Minister Baroness Chalker wrote on 14th May: "at this early stage in the financial year it is premature to contemplate seeking additional funds from the Treasury".

The notion that there is nothing in it for us, that Britain has no direct interest in a former Belgian colony in Central Africa, must not be allowed to excuse this country from a share in the responsibility for events in Rwanda and their impact on neighbouring countries. These countries are as much the victims of poverty and injustice as of ethnic divisions. The average farming family in Rwanda has a cash income of less than £200 a year. The holocaust of the last few weeks can only be understood in the context of the grinding poverty of most of Rwanda's people, and that in turn can only be understood in the context of Africa's continuing exclusion from the relative prosperity of the developed world.

Conclusion: Until a few weeks ago, many people feared that 1994 would be the year of a truly horrific bloodbath in South Africa. It was thought that those who stood to lose by the advent of democracy, notably among the Afrikaners and the Zulus, might unleash violence on a much greater scale than that already seen in recent years. To date, although lives have continued to be lost, that has not happened. Instead, genocide and political mass murder have erupted in Rwanda with such ferocity as to shock and horrify the world community.

The differences between the two countries are many: Rwanda has not produced a Mandela or a de Klerk, it has not benefited from media interest in the way South Africa has, and it lacks the economic resources to make its fate a matter of vital interest to the international community as a whole. But the reality is that conditions in Rwanda are much more typical of those in the continent as a whole than are those in South Africa. Poverty, under-development, inadequate nutrition and social conflict are all too typical of Africa today. If the international community fails to respond adequately to the Rwanda disaster, it will fail not just Rwanda and its neighbours but Africa and the developing world as a whole.

For Immediate Release: 7 June 1994
159/94

HARTLEY HOSPITAL
Letter for publication: Nelson Leader series

Your story last week (Hartley Fever!) has one of the new purchasers of Hartley Hospital (Howard Rigg) expressing surprise at my "outburst" over the intentions of the new buyers. He says he does not know what I am trying to achieve. Put simply, I want to see transparency in the decisions of our National Health Service.

Mr Rigg is a director of Pendle Industrial Services Limited and a member of the consortium that has bought the hospital. His company is principally involved in property owning and managing and dealing in industrial materials. He is also a director of PSL marketing along with one of the other buyers, Tim Webber, (who is also a director of Barnfield Homes Ltd, Barnfield Quality Homes Ltd and AJF Restaurants Ltd). This is all publicly available information from Companies House. Ironically, the information which is not currently available to me belongs to the NHS - nominally, at least, owned and accountable to us all.

I want to know the selling price of the hospital and I want sight of the valuation report which was submitted to Sir Bruce Martin, the then chair of the North West Regional Health Authority on 8 February this year. I am told it is confidential. Now that the sale has gone through I see no reason why I - as the area's Member of Parliament - or any other member of the public for that matter should not see it. I am interested in the assumptions the valuer makes (on planning, on development possibilities, on costs of refurbishment and so on) which led him to place a particular value on the site which is in designated green belt. I have asked the Secretary of State for Health to intervene so this information is made available to me.

As I write, I have in front of me the latest edition of the NHS Estate Code - the bible for those in the health service who have responsibility for managing land and property. In paragraphs 4.56 and 4.57 it says this: *"For all but the smallest disposals (for example individual houses on small plots) it will generally be necessary to identify the planning potential of NHS land, which will often be zoned "hospital" or similar in the local town plan. A formal consent for change of use will normally be the best safeguard against disposal at a disadvantageous price. Preparatory work should always include the early involvement of the district valuer and regional estate surveyor to ensure that appropriate professional advice is obtained (legal, estate surveying, specialist consultants)... Close relationships with the local planning department can pay dividends, particularly if forward plans are linked into the local district plan so that potentially surplus NHS land can be given an alternative identified use."*

For whatever reason, in all the years the hospital was lying empty, no formal approach was ever made to the local planning authority.

As your report says, I wish the new consortium well in their publicly stated plans to turn Hartley into a 80 to 100 bed hospital or nursing home or similar facility. They are business people and I have no axe to grind with them. They put in a bid; it was accepted and now they own Hartley Hospital. I simply want to know how the deal was arrived at - and its terms. And, at some stage, I shall find out.

Gordon Prentice MP
House of Commons

160/94 For Immediate Release: 8 June 1994

MP COMMUNES WITH NATURE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be communing with English nature - or, rather, the Countryside Commission - this weekend, picking the brains of the Chairman, Sir John Johnson, and others on current issues facing rural areas.

The MP will be holed up in one of the most inaccessible parts of the Lake District with the countryside experts discussing matters such as the National Parks, forestry and recreation, agriculture and the environment and access to the countryside.

Prentice said: "I think the Labour Party has a problem getting its case across to those who live in rural areas and we've got to work at this. We still have this

sooty, urban, city image which belies the reality. We have a real interest and concern for the countryside."

"It makes my blood boil, for example, when people who, like me, enjoy getting out and about in the country cannot walk across uncultivated land because it is fenced off or is otherwise out-of- bounds for no good reason. Access to the countryside is a burning issue at the moment because of the aggravated trespass provisions in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, the proposed merger of the Countryside Commission with English Nature and the possible privatisation of the Forestry Commission."

Note to Editors: Since 1990 there have been sweeping organisational changes in the nature and landscape conservation agencies in the UK. A report on the proposed English Nature/Countryside Commission merger by the British Association of Nature Conservationists has warned that such a merger would substantially strengthen landowners' powers since EN has been fostering links with landowners, who are traditionally hostile to open access to the countryside.

ABOUT THE HOUSE
with Gordon Prentice MP

What shall I do with the Brownies?

What do you do with Brownies at Westminster? In the next week or two I'm expecting a pack of them from Pendle to drop in on me as part of a longer visit to the capital.

I have been thinking about how to keep up to 30 little pixies and elves interested and amused as they follow me around the precincts of the Palace of Westminster, built on a bed of concrete 10 feet thick, with 1,100 rooms, 100 staircases, 35 passenger lifts and 2 miles of passages. I can't send them up Big Ben - which is something I like to arrange for (fit and healthy) constituents because there is an age bar and they're below it.

I get a regular stream of people from Pendle dropping into the House of Commons and, if I am free, I always like to say hello and show them round. But there is a (non-cash!) price to be paid by the visitor. My commentary on the crenellations, architecture and history of Parliament is never entirely neutral nor, in the jargon, *value free* . I always like to inject a little bit of politics into it.

For example, at Westminster there are two classes of people - the Members (like me) and the Strangers (like you). The former are treated with great reverence by the Palace functionaries and the latter are just about tolerated.

This disdainful attitude doesn't apply to the behaviour of the MPs who strive mightily to be charming and pleasant to their constituents. They - unlike the Palace functionaries - all have a vote!

This time, I can't give my little visitors the usual spiel - which is to describe the magnificent surroundings of the Palace and then explain why it desperately needs to be reformed. Our creaking and antique unwritten constitution is next to impossible to change - which is why the absurdity of the hereditary House of Lords has survived for so long.

Most of the Palace is relatively modern. It dates from the mid 19th century and was built to replace the old one that burned down in the great fire of 1834. Fortunately, the historic Westminster Hall was saved and it is one of the few surviving gems from the medieval period. It dates from just after the Norman Conquest and the hammer beam timber roof, dating from 1399, is magnificent.

The Hall was used for all the great state ceremonies and the last coronation banquet was held there in 1821. The King's Champion, in a full set of armour, rode into the Hall demanding to know if anyone present was foolish enough to challenge the right of George IV to take the throne. Silence. And the Champion clattered out again, no doubt relieved.

Westminster Hall is witness to some of the greatest events in English history. It was here that Guy Fawkes was tried after his Gunpowder Plot turned out to be a damp squib. And it was here, too, that Charles I, proclaiming to the bitter end the divine right of Kings to rule, was sentenced to death.

It was in Westminster Hall that Oliver Cromwell took the oath as Lord Protector of England in 1653. But he, like Charles I, came to a sticky end. In 1661 his body was exhumed and his severed head was stuck on a pole and left on the roof of the Hall for twenty three years, until 1684.

Now, I'm sure Brown Owl could handle this gruesome stuff but is it really something I should tell the Brownies?

Gordon Prentice MP

(161/94. 8 June 94)

163/94: For Immediate Release: 14 June 1994

MP TO MEET ROLLS ROYCE CHIEFS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet the Chairman and senior Board members of Rolls Royce on 13 July to discuss the company's business strategy and its plans for the future. The MP will be joining other colleagues from constituencies across the country where the company has plants.

Prentice said: "This meeting comes on the back of an earlier one held with the Rolls Royce Combine at the House of Commons on 16 March and it was clear from that meeting there were major concerns about the direction the company was taking. I was, of course, aware of the views of people at Barnoldswick but it

was useful to hear what people from elsewhere in the company had to say. There are, for example, fears that high value added work is being transferred overseas and along with advanced technology.

The meeting with the Rolls Royce unions in March secured the Pendle MP's backing for the 19 key recommendations from the Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee which are designed to secure the future of the industry. The unions want the Government to increase aid to aerospace and give more energetic backing to aerospace companies. They also want the Government to do more work on defence conversion.

The MP said: "I am very concerned indeed about the future of our aerospace industry and the implications for the North West of its continuing contraction. It is not just a loss of jobs we should be worried about but also the erosion of the region's reservoir of skills. In the decade 1981 - 1991 our leading high tech industry, aerospace, lost 37,600 jobs. It is as plain as a pikestaff the Government is not doing enough to help. Michael Heseltine, for all his talk about intervening before breakfast, dinner and tea is PR hype. He doesn't even have a published strategy for aerospace!"

Note to Editors: In 1981, aerospace employed 185,000 people. In 1991, 147,400.

For Immediate Release: 14 June 1994
164/94

MP CHALLENGES HEALTH CHIEF ON SECRET SALE PRICE OF HOSPITAL

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has crossed swords again with Sir Donald Wilson, the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority over the selling price of Hartley Hospital in Colne.

In a terse letter Sir Donald told the MP *"Thank you for your letter of 25 May 1994 requesting information regarding the purchase price of Hartley Hospital, Colne. Unfortunately as the information you have requested is commercially confidential between the purchaser and the vendor, I am unable to provide you with this information. I apologise that I cannot be of further assistance on this occasion."*

Prentice commented: "This reply is pure baloney and I have today written to Sir Donald telling him not to shelter behind spurious "commercial confidentiality" and to give me the information I've asked for. This information ought to appear in the accounts of the Regional Health Authority and I have written to the Chairman of the Audit Commission - which has responsibility for auditing the accounts of the Regional Health Authorities - drawing his attention to the whole affair."

The MP added: "Who do these people think they are anyway? The original sale of Hartley Hospital was sanctioned by one man, an appointee of the Secretary of State for Health - Sir Bruce Martin, the Chairman of the old North Western RHA (which was merged in April of this year with Merseyside to become the North West RHA). He took the decision in private, acting under delegated powers. Now, his unelected successor, Sir Donald Wilson says the area's Member of Parliament is not going to be told the sale price - something which

eventually ought to be referred to in the audited accounts of the RHA. Even if there is no requirement to itemise the sale of individual assets, I am absolutely certain it must be good practice to show large items such as the sale of a hospital."

more follows

Hartley Hospital secret sale price

"This whole business is descending from tragedy into farce. The RHA is behaving like the KGB at the height of the Cold War! I have already asked the Health Secretary to instruct the RHA to make this information available to me. Given that I should be able to get the information in due course from the audited accounts, this continued refusal to disclose the facts is simply bizarre."

Note to Editors: Under Section 98 of the National Health Service Act 1977, as amended, Regional Health Authorities must keep accounts which are then audited by auditors appointed by the Audit Commission. Under the Local Government Finance Act 1982, the Audit Commission is obliged to satisfy itself that the RHA has complied with all the statutory provisions and that proper practices have been observed in compiling the accounts. The RHA must also show it has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

165/94

ABOUT THE HOUSE
with Gordon Prentice MP

A WALK IN THE LAKES

I spent last weekend deep in the Lake District with leading lights from the Countryside Commission - the body set up to promote and protect rural England.

Our destination was the remote Black Sail Hostel, accessible only to mountain goats, seasoned hill walkers and MPs like myself who believe they are fitter than they really are. By the time I arrived my lungs were burning, my heart thumping and my legs aching. It was clear to me I was a wreck but one with a warm feeling of achievement!

It was also an astute move by our hosts. Here we were, three MPs invited to one of the remotest corners of one of the most beautiful national parks with an opportunity to exchange views with people with real knowledge and feeling for the countryside. We were 270 miles away from the division bells - and a

million light years away from the green leather benches of Westminster. We were stuck in the middle of nowhere with no escape.

The eleven national parks in England and Wales contain some of the most beautiful and precious areas of Britain. I believe they deserve the highest level of protection. Tragically, only in the past few days, yet another piece of Private Members legislation - Lord Norrie's National Parks Bill - which would have benefitted the environment has been sabotaged by a Government unwilling to see it make progress. (The Disabled Rights Bill is the most celebrated recent example of this phenomenon.)

There are, of course, times when the Government's rhetoric diverges sharply from practice. The Hedgerows Bill is a case in point. Despite the appalling damage which has been done to this important habitat over the past decade, it suffered the same fate as the National Parks Bill.

In January, in its publication *Biodiversity - the UK Action Plan*, the Government revealed that between 1984 and 1990 there was a net loss of 23% of hedges (about 130,000 kilometres) in Great Britain. And between 1978 and 1990, on average one plant species was lost from each metre of hedge, an 8% loss of plant species diversity. These are truly horrifying statistics describing a problem which demands urgent attention.

In precisely the same way, our national parks need help if they are to retain their special characteristics. They can too easily be blighted by things such as inappropriate tourist developments.

As everyone knows, the Government is busily engaged in redrawing the local government map of England but, so far, little attention has been focussed on the implications for the national parks. The parks shouldn't be an afterthought.

In Pendle we have a vested interest. We have one - the Yorkshire Dales National Park - on our very doorstep. We should promote the enjoyment and understanding of the countryside while protecting the interests of those who live and work there. And all park authorities should have responsibility for rights of way. Astonishingly, some of them do not even have this key power at present.

One of the main causes of damage to national parks is quarrying for minerals. There should be greater control over these activites. Because many existing quarries were granted planning permission many years ago, the environmental and restoration conditions attached are often weak or non-existant. (This reminds me of the Knotts Lane Cement Works saga.) It should be possible for authorities to impose stricter conditions retrospectively. And quarries in national parks should be given a maximum future life of ten years.

Some national parks are heavily affected by military activity and this should be wound down. To be fair, the Government has promised to do this but we must ensure this becomes more than yet another good intention. I don't want to see the parks used for military purposes, other than in exceptional circumstances.

Then there is the ever present threat from the Department of Transport which has an insatiable desire to concrete over the British countryside.

I pray the day never comes when it will be possible to drive to Black Sail.

For Immediate Release: 15 June 1994
166/94

PENDLE JOBLESS DIPS AGAIN

The number of people out of work in Pendle and claiming benefit has fallen to 2,742 - the lowest since November 1993. This represents 7.3% of the working population.

Male unemployment was 2,105 (9.7%) and female unemployment stood at 637. Vacancies were down at Colne Job Centre and up at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The fall in the claimant count is very welcome although these figures do not give a true picture of unemployment in the area. After years of massaging and manipulating the jobless totals, we take them for what they are worth."

"The jobless figure is not remotely close to the number John Major inherited when he became Prime Minister in November 1990. The number then was 1,708."

For Immediate Release: 15 June 1994
167/94

PENDLE MP CONDEMNS "GREAT RAILWAY RIP-OFF"

"It's only a few weeks since the Tories split up British Rail ready for privatisation and already the system is falling apart" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP says: "Children's fares for families with Family Railcards have doubled. The right of everybody to choose their own route from A to B has been taken away. People are being stopped from using Saver and SuperSaver tickets. Now we can reveal secret plans by railway managers to cut services without any protection for the passengers."

"We warned this would happen. We said that before the Tories sold off a single service to their friends in the City there would be fewer trains, rising fares and less choice. Lying Tory Ministers kept on denying it but now it's happening before our eyes.

"That's why I'm urging the local Rail Users Consultative Committee to conduct an immediate investigation into this rip-off. People in Pendle are entitled to reasonable fares and a top quality rail system. I'm determined they should get it."

more follows

Note to Editors: John Moorhouse is Secretary of the Rail Users' Consultative Committee for North West England, Room 112, Boulton House, 17-21 Chorlton Street, Manchester M1 3HY.

On 1 April 1994, the Tories took the nationwide rail network, British Rail, split it up into lots of separate companies and told them to compete with each other. This note provides examples of how, since then -

Rail companies have secretly planned to price lines out of existence and to weaken fares and service regulation

SuperSaver and other discounted tickets have been withdrawn

• Passengers' choice of journey routes has been taken away

Railway Rip-Off

• Passenger information on rival rail companies' connections has been withheld

Competing rail companies have ceased to recognise each others' tickets

• The cost of children's rail travel has doubled

Labour warned this would happen. We said that before the Tories sold off a single service to their friends in the City, there would be fewer trains, rising fares and less choice. Lying Tory Ministers kept on denying it would happen. This Update exposes their lies.

THE SECRET PLAN TO PRICE ROUTES OUT OF EXISTENCE AND WEAKEN FARES AND SERVICE REGULATION

A leaked internal Regional Railways memorandum has revealed plans to impose higher prices on selected cross-country routes. The memorandum says -

"These fares are being introduced in an effort to dampen down demand on routes for which we cannot economically afford to provide resources."

One of the first lines affected is the Birmingham to Great Yarmouth line. The price for a return ticket for Saturday services has been increased from £48.00 to £58.00 - a rise of

Another example is to be found in the North West where the Cheap Day Return between Oxenholme and Carlisle has been withdrawn. As a result, the cheapest daily fare between Oxenholme and Carlisle has risen from £8.50 to £11.00 - a fare rise of almost 30 per cent. At the same time, the usual trains used on this service have been withdrawn and replaced by a much smaller 2-coach 'Sprinter' type train. As a result, a previously adequate service is now overcrowded and people are having to stand.

One passenger writing to the North West Rail Users Consultative Committee about the decline of this service commented -

"Up to last weekend I found the cost of rail travel comparable to motoring but preferred the train as it is more relaxing and I am able to read or work during the journey...I am afraid these two issues of fares and rolling stock may have the effect of turning myself and other passengers away from this local service - possibly leading to its eventual withdrawal."

This is precisely the effect which Labour has warned would result from setting one rail company against another. It is a similar pattern of behaviour to that which emerged as a result of bus deregulation. Rural and other off peak travel is cut or priced out of existence as companies get rid of what they might regard as 'expensive' services, which either require subsidy or are less profit-making than peak time, or more urban, services.

This not only reduces choice for rail passengers. As the above letter shows it also forces many people to travel by car, when they might prefer to travel by rail, adding to road congestion and delays. In this respect, the

Railway Rip-Off

'Great Railway Rip-Off' is a disaster for road users as well as those travelling by train.

The examples contained in this Update are likely to be only the tip of the iceberg. Secretly, the rail managers wish to be given complete freedom to reduce services and raise fares, with a minimum amount of interference from either of the two regulatory bodies proposed for the privatised rail system the Office of the Rail Regulator and OPRAF.

Labour has obtained a copy of a letter dated 10 March 1994 from British Rail's Chief Executive, John Welsby, to Roger Salmon, the Franchising Director.

In his letter, Mr. Welsby calls plans for regulation -

"a prescriptive regime with little room for innovative commercial opportunities...extremely intrusive especially in the rigidity of the service specifications and the change mechanisms."

He reveals plans by members of the newly-created Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) to alter fares and services in their regions without the permission of the regulators, saying -

"It seems unnecessary to impose the requirement that ATOC members cannot vote without your consent to amend Inter Operator Schemes."

He rejects the idea that rail companies' concessionary fare schemes should be protected, asking -

"How do they make a profit on imposed concessionary fare schemes if the 'reasonable opinion' of the Franchise Director is only to pay the financial loss incurred?"

Finally he reveals that the rail managers wish to be given the right to cut services at only a few weeks' notice -

"Giving 6 months notice of all service changes is unreasonable. We surely want the Franchisees to be at least as flexible as BR in responding to market forces. The minimum time for change is likely to be eight weeks."

This makes it clear that the examples contained in the Update of fare rises and service reductions in the first few weeks since the fragmentation of British Rail are only the beginning of a much more dangerous continuing process of rail privatisation.

These examples are a taster of worse things to come if the Tories' madcap plans are not halted.

SUPERSAVER TICKETS WITHDRAWN

Up to the end of May 1994, travellers from Leeds wishing to travel to London could pay £44.00 for a SuperSaver ticket on the 5.00 am morning train from Leeds to arrive in London at 7.35 am. This facility has now been withdrawn. From now on they will have to pay £93.00 (a fare rise of 111 per cent) or wait for a train which gets into London at 11.27 am.

The same situation applies if you want to make an early start from York. Early morning passengers from York to London used to be able to pay

£45.00 for a SuperSaver ticket on the 6.00 am train to arrive in London at 8.15 am. Now they must cough up £95.00 or get into London at 11.39 am.

It's not just that managers have a grudge against people from Yorkshire. They have struck at people in the West Midlands as well.

Managers on the former InterCity West Coast Main Line have withdrawn the full range of SuperSaver tickets from former InterCity services. As a result, travellers from Birmingham, Rugby, Coventry, Wolverhampton and Telford cannot use SuperSavers, valid for a month, to travel to London. If they wish to travel to London and stay overnight, instead of paying £18.00 for their trip, they now have to pay £26.00 - a fare rise of 44 per cent.

CHOICE OF ROUTES ABANDONED

The 'Great Railway Rip-Off' doesn't just mean higher fares and fewer services. On the services which do remain, the new know-all managers have started to dictate to passengers which routes they must use.

Until last week, travellers using InterCity Cross Country services were able to travel by "any reasonable route". It was up to them how they got from A to B. But now the managers on these routes are telling passengers they can only travel by one route, often not the best one.

People could travel from Cardiff to Preston on the hourly service via Crewe. Not any more. The managers have told them they can't. Now they can only travel to Preston via Wolverhampton.

Travellers from South Wales to Scotland face similar problems. Through tickets to Stirling and points north are now routed via Lancaster. Passengers have been denied the choice of using the modernised East Coast Main Line via York. Instead, they'll be stuck on the ramshackle West Coast Main Line.

INFORMATION WITHHELD

Privatisation madness has reached massive proportions in London and the Home Counties. Before the break-up of British Rail, passengers used to be served by a network of interconnected lines known as Network South East. The maps displayed in trains showed all the useful connections on that line. Not any more.

Network South East has been broken up into competing companies, two of which are South Central and South West Trains. Both these companies have taken down the old maps in their trains and replaced them with maps which show only those lines run by their individual segment of the network. The new maps leave out the lines and stations used by their competitors.

According to the new South Central in-train maps, Beckenham Junction is a terminus with no connections to anywhere. It would be a laugh if it wasn't a disaster.

COMPANIES REFUSE TO RECOGNISE EACH OTHER

The 'Great Railway Rip-Off' has created chaos in the Shires. On a Friday morning in early June a passenger went to Southampton Station to buy a ticket to Salisbury. South West Trains run both Southampton and Salisbury stations, but Regional Railways operate the trains between them.

The passenger was told that Regional Railways would not now accept tickets using Network Cards and issued at stations run by South West Trains, because they didn't have an agreement with South West Trains. The passenger was told that she would have to wait until after 5.00 pm if she wished to travel with her Network Card.

COST OF CHILDREN'S RAIL TRAVEL DOUBLES

The 'Great Railway Rip-Off' is especially hard on parents with children. For each of the past two years, just under one million children have travelled on British Rail with parents using a Family Railcard. Now the new management has doubled the flat rate for children. It means a fare rise of £1 million a year in the cost of children's rail travel.

It will certainly raise more money for the railways but at the expense of family budgets already hard hit with VAT, national insurance and income tax increases.

For Immediate Release: 14 June 1994
169/94

PENDLE MP BACKS BECKETT IN LABOUR LEADERSHIP

The battle to win the leadership of the Labour Party is underway and local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be nominating the acting Leader, Margaret Beckett, for the top job.

The MP said: "This election will potentially involve millions of people and it is a unique exercise in mass, participatory politics. To enter the field, candidates must first secure nominations from Labour MPs and we are spoilt for choice. Apart from Margaret Beckett, Tony Blair and John Prescott there are others in the Shadow Cabinet who have chosen not to throw their hat into the ring but who would have been considered serious contenders. This means one thing. The Labour Party is offering the country a team of competent people - real strength in depth. Compare this to the shambles of the Tory Party where, according to Press reports today, John Major is expected to axe no fewer than six Cabinet colleagues."

"In her two years as Deputy Leader, Margaret Beckett has shown herself to be extremely competent and cool under fire. I also want to see a woman in the Leadership. That said, I, and all my Parliamentary colleagues, will work happily and energetically for whoever comes top of the poll. Each one of them has their own strengths and qualities."

For Immediate Release: 14 June 1994
170/94

MP SWAMPED BY PETITIONS ON BARLICK DELIVERY OFFICE PROTEST

The threatened closure of the Post Office Delivery Office in Barnoldswick has triggered a massive protest locally says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He has received thousands of signatures from people concerned about the possible loss of the service and the impact on the local community.

The MP said: "I am in touch with the Area Delivery Manager, Steve Geldard, to make sure he is fully aware of the strength of local opinion. People in the town don't want to lose their delivery office as they have lost their electricity and gas showrooms, their Job Centre and much else besides."

"Any move to centralise operations elsewhere in Pendle will cause major problems. There would be a loss of local knowledge and, possibly, a loss of local jobs."

"The Post Office has promised to let me have details of the proposals just as soon as they are finalised. I then want to see a period of consultation on the planned changes. And if people aren't persuaded, the plans should be spiked."

For Immediate Release: 14 June 1994
171/94

COUNCIL REVIEW "DISAPPOINTING" says LOCAL MP

The Local Government Commission has unveiled its plans for a big shake up of councils in Lancashire. The Commission - charged by the Government with the

task of redrawing the local authority map of England - wants to see Pendle join with Burnley and Rossendale to form a new council delivering all council services. With this option, Lancashire County Council would be abolished and key responsibilities such as education and social services would transfer to the new authority.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I am deeply disappointed that the Commission has seen fit to ignore the overwhelming view of people in Pendle who clearly want their own unitary authority on present boundaries. To rub salt into the wound, the Commission has conceded this principle by recommending West Lancashire District Council becomes a new unitary authority in its own right on its present boundaries."

"There is now a consultation period and I wait to see the reaction to the proposals. I am sure people here don't want to be bolted on to a much bigger authority but we've got to explore the ramifications and what it means in practice. There must not be a takeover. If it goes ahead it must be seen as a wholly new and decentralised authority."

"I have always been in favour of unitary councils delivering all local services. The two tier system has major drawbacks. People are confused about who does what and its always too easy to blame County Hall in Preston for every misfortune. In local government we need accountability and transparency. People need to know where power lies and how it can be influenced."

For Immediate Release: 14 June 1994
172/94

PENDLE MP HAILS EURO VOTE

The results of the European Parliament elections last Thursday have been hailed as a triumph by local MP, Gordon Prentice. He said the election of Mark Hendrick as the new MEP for Lancashire Central was marvellous news for the area.

Prentice said: "I've been expecting this sea change for some time now. I know simply from speaking to people in Pendle that there is tremendous alienation from the entire political process. There is cynicism and a deep sense of betrayal and, astonishing as it must appear to the Conservatives who act as if they have a divine right to rule, the people have comprehensively rejected them."

"A year ago, after the County Council elections which left the Conservatives with one County Council, Buckinghamshire, the Prime Minister confessed the electorate had given the Tories a bloody nose. What on earth have the voters done this time? The Conservatives have been hung, drawn and quartered!"

The MP added: "The Liberal Democrats never got off the starting block. Their historic mission has traditionally been to split the anti Conservative vote - as they did in Parliamentary elections here in Pendle for thirteen years until April 1992. After the eccentric performance of the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary candidate in Newham who withdrew from the election 24 hours before polling began, lots of people must have fought shy of voting for them

this time. People no longer want to take a chance when they cast their vote. They are going for the alternative Party of Government."

Embargoes until: 14 June 2094
173/94

PENDLE MP DUBBED "FAXER OF THE YEAR"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been given the accolade of "Faxer of the Year" by the prestigious Granada political programme Granada on Sunday.

Producer Brian Morris says: "This MP has completely bowled us over by his staggering productivity. He is clearly destined for high office. Until he came along we didn't even realise North East Lancashire was in our patch!"

In an uncharacteristic move the MP declined to comment on the significance of the award.

For Immediate Release: 15 June 1994
174/94

THE ROYAL FAMILY - ANY USE?

On Monday 20 June, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining a panel of pundits in front of an audience of Cardiff University students to debate the role of the Royal Family. He will be fielding questions from students as well as from others on the panel.

The 50 minute programme Arthur Smith's "On the Floor" will be broadcast on Radio 5 Live at 9.00pm on Monday 20 June.*

The Pendle MP has been dubbed "Faxer of the Year" by Granada TV's political programme Granada on Sunday. The 60 second award ceremony will be transmitted this Sunday, 19 June, at 12.30pm

Note to Editors: *The MP will not be joining the panel if there is a three line whip on Monday.

For Immediate Release: 23 June 1994
175/94

MP TARGETS CANADA GEESE

A report which could spell life or death to the Canada Goose is to be published by the end of the month by the Department of the Environment. The working party was set up to investigate ways of controlling the number of Canada Geese which are viewed by some people as a pest and nuisance.

The issue gripped the local press earlier in the year after reports that Canada Geese flying over the reservoir at Foulridge had been blasted out of the air by people claiming they were simply controlling pests.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The Wildlife and Countryside Act permits Canada Geese to be shot in the open season between 1 September and 30 January but no reasonable person wants to see birds blasted out of the skies for no good reason. I certainly welcome this forthcoming report which will be a guide on legal methods of controlling these birds."

"I recognise that wildlife and countryside management inevitably involves culling but that is very different from killing living creatures for sport. I find that completely abhorrent."

ends

Note to Editors: Labour's position on Country Sports

Wild Mammals: It is Labour policy to make it an offence to inflict cruelty on wild mammals.

The 1911 Protection of Animals Act is the basis of current statutory protection for animals against cruelty. It is, however, specific in its protection to domestic or captive animals. Unless wild animals are specifically legislated for (an example being badgers) there is absolutely no protection for wild animals against cruelty.

Labour recognises that there will always be killing in the countryside, in predator and pest control, culling and taking game. We do, however, feel that when killing is necessary it should be achieved in as humane a way as possible using ways which minimise cruelty and eliminate unnecessary suffering.

Hunting With Hounds: As part of our legislation to outlaw cruelty to wild animals, Labour will allow a free vote in the House of Commons to ban the hunting of live quarry with hounds.

The primary purpose of much hunting is not to kill the hunted animal as quickly and humanely as possible but to prolong the chase and give maximum enjoyment to the hunt followers. Labour regards this as the deliberate infliction of unnecessary suffering. Hunting live quarry with hounds, terrier work and hare coursing would be the main issues dealt with by the free vote.

Were Parliament to accept the principle of a ban on hunting of mammals with hounds then an additional specific offence of using a dog for the purpose of deliberately killing or hunting a wild mammal would be incorporated. Labour would not ban the use of dogs for flushing and retrieving game, or for the taking of rabbits and rodents which are small enough to be killed swiftly by dogs.

Labour recognises that there can be localised problems of predation on game and farm stock. Labour would, therefore, permit the licensed use of dogs for predator control in specific circumstances where serious economic damage is being done and where - in areas of dense cover of open moorland for example - other control methods prove
ineffective.

Foxes: People go fox hunting for many reasons: the socialising, the chase; but fox population control is not one of them. It can be said to be doubtful that foxes cause major livestock loss, certainly the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries

and Food do not seem to think they do. In a letter of 17 February 1994 Miss K Donne, writing for MAFF, stated that:

"Surveys have shown that approximately 5% of lamb deaths are caused by predation and misadventure combined This compares with abortion and stillbirth (40%), exposure and starvation (30°/O) and infectious disease (20%). On this basis the Ministry does not consider foxes to be a significant factor in lamb mortality nationally.

The letter does go on to recognise that fox predation might be a problem at local level, but then so do the Labour Party which is why we do not intend to ban predator control.

Assuming that foxes do need to be controlled, however, there can scarcely be a less effective way of killing them than hunting with hounds. In 1987 , Dr. (now Professor) Stephen Harris estimated that between 12,000 and 13,000 foxes were killed each season by hunts. This works out at about 2.5% of the fox population and just I in 10 of those foxes killed annually. More foxes actually die each year in road accidents. Professor Harris also felt that the fox population could withstand an annual mortality rate of up to 70% without suffering a significant reduction in the fox population.

"Whilst it undoubtedly accounts for a number of foxes the Ministry does not consider fox hunting to be a major controlling factor in the fox population."

Deer: Deer can damage crops and woodland, and compete with livestock for grass. Labour recognises the need to cull deer. Culling by marksmen is recognised to be the safest, most selective and humane method available.

In order to ensure that weapons used for deer culling are appropriate for the task Labour shall, with interested parties, review the law relating to the types of weapons permitted for the killing of deer.

Labour shall encourage the setting up of local Deer Management Schemes within which deer experts, farmers, landowners and conservationists can co-ordinate management and culling.

Deer hunting with hounds involves chasing the animal for long periods of time and distance until it is brought to bay and shot at close quarters. A relatively small number of deer are caught this way, hunts favour chasing the strong and the young rather than the weak and the old in order to make a better chase. Hunting deer is not, of its own, an effective method of control, it does not facilitate, and may even complicate, properly managed culling, and it does not minimise the suffering of the individual animal.

Hares: Hunting and coursing hares both inflict unnecessary suffering and both would be banned were the free vote to be passed. Labour will allow the continued shooting of hares for the pot and in circumstances where they are causing serious economic damage providing that their shooting is sustainable and does not cause a significant decline in the local hare population. Labour wants stronger measures taken against illegal coursing.

Mink: Mink are now well established in Britain and there seems little likelihood of eliminating them as a feral species, especially by hunts who have substituted mink as their quarry since otter hunting was banned in 1978.

Shooting and live trapping of mink will continue as will other methods, where necessary, under licence.

Shooting and Fishing: Because hunters are such a small and reviled number it is their tactic to try and link the sports of shooting and fishing with theirs and scare participants in these pastimes into thinking that Labour will ban hunting, shooting and fishing. This is completely untrue. It is not and never has been our intention to prohibit responsible shooting and angling.

Shooting: Labour recognises that shooting is often the most appropriate, humane and selective method of controlling pest species, as well as being popular and integral to game management. We also acknowledge the' contribution of carefully managed country shooting to the conservation of wildlife habitat.

Labour believes in working with interested organisations, such as the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the Game Conservancy, in developing best codes of practice for game management, shooting and conservation. Labour will not ban shooting.

Fishing: Because of Labour's plans for cleaning up water courses, increasing protection for Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and establishing more National Parks and Marine Nature Reserves, it is likely that Labour will, if anything, make conditions better for both fish and angler.

Labour is working with national groups to ensure best codes of practice in the sport. Labour will not ban fishing.

Badgers: Badgers and their setts are protected from persecution by the 1992 Protection of Badgers Act. This has not, however, proven totally effective in protecting setts from interference and digging. Unless the Police catch people actually digging a badger sett badger baiters cannot be prosecuted. When challenged by Police or landowners before they have started digging those intending to dig out badgers simply say they are planning to dig out foxes, which is not illegal.

Labour intends to strengthen the existing legislation to further protect badgers and their setts. The excuse of digging to set dogs on foxes will no longer be relevant as it will itself become an offence, except under licence, if the free vote is passed in Parliament.

Conservatives and Liberals: Labour has consistently shown itself as the only major political party to trust on issues of animal welfare and there is no better example of this than attitudes, statements and actual voting on hunting. There have been two recent votes that can show party attitudes to cruel sports.

McNamara Bill: On 14 February 1992 Kevin McNamara MP put a Private Members Bill before the House of Commons to ban hunting. In the vote the chance to ban hunting was lost by 12 votes. On a free vote 14 members of the Cabinet (2/3) voted against the Bill whilst 7.6% of Conservative MPs voted for it.

If the actions of the majority of Conservative MPs may be understood if not forgiven the actions of the Liberals showed them in their true light of trying to face both ways at once. With a declared policy to ban hunting, three time as

many Liberal MPs voted against the Bill as for it and a pitiful 4. 5% of Liberal MPs actually voted for the Bill. Needless to say not one Labour MP voted against the Bill.

Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill: During the Report stage of this Bill on 12 April 1994 Elliot Morley MP, Labour Spokesperson for Animal Welfare, introduced a Clause to give badgers extra protection against baiters. In the vote on the clause the Government put a three line whip on their MPs to foil it.

The Liberals again showed their true colours once more with 3 voting for the clause, 8 against it and 11 abstaining.

The Conservatives are already discredited in their commitment to animal welfare so their voting comes as little surprise. The Liberals, however, often try to take the mantle of the party that cares about animal welfare. Whilst their policies may look attractive on paper when it comes to the crunch they are not to be trusted where it matters - in the division lobby.

Labour is the only party to have well researched animal welfare policies and the political will to carry them out.

For Immediate Release: 24 June 1994
176/94

LOCAL MP CONDEMNS "TORIES' RAIL STRIKE"

The Government should stop interfering in the rail dispute. They should allow proper negotiations to take place to end the dispute says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "Nobody except the Government wants a rail strike. Passengers certainly don't want it, the signal staff don't want it, Railtrack doesn't want it and the Labour Party doesn't want it."

"It is plainly the case that Railtrack and the union had almost agreed a settlement including some reward for past improvements in productivity. The Government sabotaged that deal."

"So the sole cause of the rail strike is meddling by the Government while they kept denying they had intervened. Now they've been forced to concede that they have been telling railway management what to say and what to do."

"It's time the Government stopped this nonsense and allowed Railtrack and the union to negotiate a settlement to the dispute in the interests of everyone concerned. Until they do, I blame the Government for this dispute. It is nothing more and nothing less than the Tories' Rail Strike."

For Immediate Release: 24 June 1994
177/94

"WHAT ABOUT THE WORKERS?" ASKS MP IN COUNCIL SHAKE UP

The controversial shake up of local government in England will have enormous implications for council staff says local MP, Gordon Prentice, who will be chairing a seminar on the issue at next week's conference of the Association of District Councils in Harrogate.

The MP, who chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's backbench Environment Committee, said: "I've said all along that this review of local government is a real dog's dinner. But if it does go through - in the teeth of so much opposition across the country -we must ensure that the new councils are adequately staffed and are able to deliver all the transferred services."

"The review of local government is supposed to be about delivering services that are closer and more responsive to local people. For me, that is the acid test of whether any proposed new structure is worth supporting."

"The Conservatives have been responsible for every local government reorganisation since the war. Each time they've made a hash of it. They are staggeringly incompetent."

ends

Note to Editors: Other speakers at the seminar (Building the Unitary Council) are Darryl Stephenson, the Chief Executive of Hull City Council, and Keith Sonnett of Unison.

For Immediate Release: 24 June 1994
179/94

MP MAKES A SPLASH WITH OFWAT

The water watchdog, OFWAT, will have to soak up plenty of criticism about the water and sewerage industry in the North West when it meets local MP, Gordon Prentice, next month in a face to face meeting at the House of Commons.

On 6 July, the MP will be meeting the Chairman of OFWAT's North West Customer Relations Committee, Anthony Goldstone, to talk about key issues such as water charges, metering and investment plans. OFWAT's Director General will be setting new price levels on 28 July which will help determine the charging policies of water companies such as our own North West Water.

The MP said: "Over the past twelve months I have been flooded with complaints about our water and sewerage services. I am currently in touch with North West Water about their plans for replacing the leakiest main in Lancashire at Foulridge. OFWAT has joined me in pressing NWW for early action on this particular problem and I welcome the opportunity of discussing things with them."

"People are fed up with paying through the nose for water."

For Immediate Release: 24 June 1994
180/94

RECREATION FACILITIES THREATENED IN FORESTRY SELL-OFF says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today called on the Government to come clean over its future plans for the Forestry Commission. The MP warned that public access to important recreational facilities is at risk.

He said: "Here in Lancashire the Forestry Commission holds over 1,100 hectares in Bowland stretching over into North Yorkshire. There are smaller holdings dotted all over the place. In Gisburn Forest there are four forest walks, seven picnic places and two car parks and there are similar facilities in forests all over the country."

The Government's Review group, set up a year ago to consider future options for the Forestry Commission, has reported to Ministers but no decision has yet been announced. It is likely that any new arrangement for the Forestry Commission will lead to an increased sell-off of woodlands with an inevitable threat to public access.

Prentice said: "The Government's constant shilly-shallying over forestry means that we cannot yet be confident that our forests are safe. Thousands of local people enjoy walking or cycling or riding in the woods. That opportunity is available at the moment in virtually every Forestry Commission woodland in the country. It would be put at risk under privatisation or partial privatisation. Britain's forests belong to all of us. They must remain in public ownership."

For Immediate Release: 24 June 1994
181/94

PENDLE TALKING NEWSPAPERS TO BE PROTECTED IN POST OFFICE SHAKE UP

The Government has given an early indication to local MP, Gordon Prentice, that talking newspapers - so vital for the blind - are to be protected in the forthcoming shake up of the Post Office.

The MP sought an assurance from Government Ministers following an approach from the Pendle District Talking Newspapers Association who were concerned about the future of the Post Office and, in particular, the free postal service for articles for the blind.

The MP said: "This assurance I have from Patrick McLoughlin, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Trade and Technology, that this service will continue will come as a great relief to everyone. I wish the Government's intentions for the rest of the service were as clear."

"At Westminster, earlier this week, I had the opportunity to speak at length with Richard Dykes, the chief of Post Office Counters, about the implications of Post Office privatisation and the costs of the Government's prevarication and delay in publishing their plans for the organisation. The Green Paper - setting out all the options - is likely to be out in the next fortnight and I am expecting an avalanche of mail from outraged constituents once the details become clear."

For Immediate Release: 28 June 1994
182/94

NORWEB's PROFITS SOAR AGAIN

Norweb, the Manchester based privatised electricity company, has announced pre-tax profits of £178.3m for 1993-4 against £157.1m for 92-93 - up 13.5%. The 92-93 profits were themselves up 14% on the year before. The profits figures, released yesterday, came alongside news that dividends will increase by 15% per share.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Norweb chairman, Kenneth Harvey, expressed concern last year about the leap in dividends paid out by the privatised electricity companies. He feared excessive profits would spark the interest and intervention of Offer - the electricity regulator. I wait to see what the regulator has to say about this latest dividend bonanza."

The MP added: "It is true that Norweb cut their electricity prices by 1.6% from last July and there was a further 6% cut in April but, with profits on this scale being reported, then why not?"

Note to Editors: Norweb has been dogged from its earliest days as a privatised electricity company by reports of big salary increases and gold plated terms and conditions of its Board Members - including the well publicised executive share option scheme.

For Immediate Release: 28 June 1994
183/94

TORIES EXTRACT CASH WITH NEW TAX ON TEETH

Fillings will cost an extra £2 each, a crown will cost £15 extra and a full set of dentures will cost an additional £20 when the Government introduces a new 25 per cent tax on teeth, says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP is urging Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley to spit out details of the £150 million "teeth tax" expected to appear in a new Government Green Paper.

The long-delayed Green Paper on dentistry is likely to increase the proportion of the cost of dental treatment paid by patients from 80 per cent to 100 per cent - a 25 per cent rise. The average course of dental treatment will cost an extra eight pounds - rising from £28 to £36.

The MP's front bench colleague, Shadow Heath Secretary, David Blunkett, yesterday published estimates of what the new teeth tax would mean.

Treatment	Now	After Teeth Tax
Check up	£3.92	£4.90
Checkup, X ray & Cleaning	£12.92	£16.15
Filling	£8.32	£10.40
Extraction	£7.12	£8.90
Crown	£59.32	£74.15
Dentures Full Set	£81.36	£101.70

Average Treatment	£27.95	£36.18

Source: British Dental Association and Parliamentary Questions. Figures refer to NHS charges only

Reports have suggested that the Green Paper is being further delayed because of the expected Cabinet reshuffle. The paper was expected to have been published last week.

CASH EXTRACTED IN NEW "TEETH TAX"

Prentice added: ""An extra 25 per cent on the average bill for dental treatment will deter yet more people from going to their dentists. As it is, many people put of going to the dentist because it may cost them an arm and a leg. Hundreds of thousands of people have been de-registered since 1992 and many dentists are refusing to take on new NHS patients."

"This outrageous new tax comes on top of the huge tax increases already introduced in April and those planned for next year. The Government has been chipping away at NHS dentistry for years - forcing people to go private.

"In many parts of the country the NHS dentist is well on the way to becoming a folk memory."

184/94 For Immediate Release: 3 July 1994

NORTH WEST WATER CHIEFS GET "MILLIONAIRE TREATMENT" says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has attacked the decision of the privatised utility, North West Water, to pay off its former managing director, Bob Thain, with a six figure golden handshake.

The MP waded into the furious row about North West Water chiefs "pay and perks" hike following the publication last week of the company's annual report for 1994. Bob Thain who left the company on 19 November last year received a pay-off of £398,400. He retained options to subscribe to 157,000 ordinary shares that had been granted to him in 1990 under the executive share option scheme.

The new Chairman, Sir Desmond Pitcher, received £338,000 (£75,000 of this was performance related) compared with his predecessor, Sir Dennis Grove's £238,000. The MP said the explosion in salaries and benefits was an absolute disgrace. "These people have no shame" he said. "Their behaviour is absolutely grotesque. I intend to raise the whole issue in the Commons."

ends

Note To Editors: The pay and perks package for ex-Chairman, Dennis Grove, increased by 43% from 1992 to 1993 from £186,000 to £267,000. Over the same period, the former Chief Executive, Bob Thian, saw his remuneration package zoom up 37% from £207,000 to £284,000.

On 30 November 1992, water chiefs were told by the then Environment Secretary, Michael Howard, (now Home Secretary) that they should set an example in pay restraint. Speaking at a Thames Water water treatment plant

he said : "As you will all know, our intention is that public sector pay rises next year should be in the range of 0% to 1.5%. I know that many people share my concern at the very large pay rises for senior management in the water industry over the past two years." Dennis Grove immediately hit back by telling the Financial Times "We have to pay the market rates to get and keep good people. These jobs are very demanding." At the time, the Pendle MP disclosed that Mr Grove had a share option scheme with NWW worth £260,000. In March 1992 he received a 15% increase taking his salary to £166,000 a year.

more follows

North West Water Bonanza

The executive share option scheme allows Directors and senior management to buy shares at an "option price" which can then be sold later at the then market price. The opportunity for making very large gains indeed is apparent. Today, NWW shares are trading at ***. Fortunes can be made by buying at a favourable price and selling later at a much higher price. (See Table on pages 32 and 33 of the Annual Report).

Executive Share Option Scheme

	Share options as at 31.3.93	Options granted during the year	Exercise price per share	First date exercisable
Sir Desmond Pitcher	-	162,338 54,112	462.0p 393.0p	5 July 96 5 July 98
A.M. Dean (ceased to be a director on 31 March 1994)	57,250		315.5p	30 January 93
R.J. Ferguson	2,750		315.5p	3 December 93
"	21,750		335.0p	8 January 95
"	7,250		285.0p	8 January 97
"	17,437		479.0p	6 January 96
"	5,812		407.5p	6 January 98
"	-	18,750	586.0p	20 January 97
"	-	6,250	498.5p	20 January 99
D. Green	110,813	-	406.0p	18 June 95
"	36,937	-	345.5p	18 June 97
"	-	13,125	586.0p	20 January 97
"	-	4,375	498.5p	20 January 99

185/94: For Immediate Release: 4 July 1994

PRENTICE SLAMS POST OFFICE PLANS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has bitterly attacked Government plans to privatise the Post Office. He says the planned sell-off is selling out the British people.

Prentice said: "The Conservative Government has no mandate for privatisation. Not a single word about a Post Office sell-off or even a review of ownership, was in their 1992 Election Manifesto."

"The Post Office is a successful public sector organisation, reporting £306 million in profits only last month. 1994 is the 18th successive year of subsidy free profits and last year the Treasury received £182 million in Danegeld from the Post Office. It is estimated that the sell-off will raise £2bn and it is plainly the case the Government is pressing ahead with privatisation to raise money for a pre election tax cut and not, in any sense, to improve services."

The privatisation proposals stem from a Government review of the Post Office which has been in hand for almost two years. The MP claims it has been conducted in private and the public, Post Office employees and the sub postmasters and mistresses have not been involved. He said: "I believe that major changes to such a vital national service deserve very close scrutiny and wide public support before they can take place."

ends

Note to Editors: On 30 June 1994 the Government issued a Green Paper on the privatisation of the Post Office and legislation will be introduced in the next Parliamentary session in the Autumn. However, before this, there is a period of public consultation and it is important for everyone who feels strongly about this issue, to make their views known.

WHAT DOES THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSE?
The Government wants to privatise the Royal Mail (which will be know as Royal Mail plc) and the parcel delivery operation, Parcelforce, whilst keeping Post Office Counters (the network of sub post offices and crown post offices) in the public sector. The privatisation is either to be 51% (with the Government retaining the other 49%) or a full 100% sell-off.

The Government concedes that the Post Office has, for centuries, made a vital contribution to our national life. It delivers over 60 million letters and three quarters of a million parcels every working day and post offices serve some 28 million customers every week. The Government says the Post Office is one of the nation's unifying forces and delivers daily services to the remotest of locations, helping to keep communities alive. The Green Paper says the Government is committed to the maintenance of these services and pledges to continue a nationwide letter and parcel service with daily deliveries to every address in the country; a uniform structure of prices and a nationwide network of post offices.

THE NATURE OF THE POST OFFICE BUSINESS
Post Office Counters represents 20% of Post Office turnover - around £1bn. It runs the network of nearly 20,000 post offices, of which 19,000 are sub-post offices owned and managed by private individuals or companies on an agency basis. The rest are directly run by Post Office Counters, which has about 15,000

staff. It provides services for many clients besides Royal Mail and Parcelforce, including the Benefits Agency, Girobank, the Driving & Vehicle Licence Agency, the Department for National Savings and a number of utility companies. Of these, much the most important is the Benefits Agency which accounts for about one third of its income. About 25% of its income comes from Royal Mail and Parcelforce

Royal Mail represents around 70% of total Post Office turnover - over £4 billion It employs 165,000 people. Most of these are front-line postmen and women providing a daily delivery service to 23.4 million addresses. Together they deal with over 60 million items of mail per day, collected from 100,000 street postboxes as well as from post offices and directly from many organisations. Royal Mail has a statutory monopoly on letters delivered for less than £1 (though the Government is committed to reducing this figure)

Parcelforce represents around 10% of Post Office turnover - around £500m. lt employs 13,000 staff and deals with three quarters of a million parcels per day. It offers an individual parcels service to customers at post officers, delivering anywhere in the country for a uniform tariff. Its main business activity, however, is to provide a collection and delivery service for larger customers on a contract basis for which it competes with many other businesses in the private sector. For reasons of efficiency it sub-contracts some of its services to Royal Mail.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?
What will happen to pricing? The Government says there will be a uniform tariff across the country but who knows what will happen in the future. There must be a fear that regional pricing will be introduced. After all, it now exists for Electricity, Water and has just been agreed for Gas - all industries privatized by this Government.

What will happen to the Post Office Branch Network? The size of the Network is declining at around 200 a year. This may well speed up after privatisation. Here in the North West we have seen the number of post offices fall by 60 since 1989

more follows

Will a national delivery to every address be maintained? The Government says so, but market liberalisation in New Zealand led to a rapid deterioration in service. Rural customers there now have to collect their post from central locations.

What will happen to the second delivery? The Government gives no guarantee that second deliveries in urban areas will be maintained. The second delivery will almost certainly go after privatisation. Indeed public accountability of the Post Office prevented it from converting to a single delivery three years ago. And what will happen to the 180 Post Buses? In many rural areas the post bus is the only remaining public transport. We need a guarantee this service survives.

What will happen to the Articles for the Blind service? At present the Post Office subsidizes this service by around £2 million each year. However, I have been reassured by the Minister, Patrick McLoughlin MP that this service will continue.

What will happen to jobs? The Union of Communication Workers estimates that up to one third of the l 50,000 Post Office employees might lose their jobs if privatisation goes ahead. At no stage, prior to the publication of the Green Paper, did the Government consult the UCW about what they had in mind for the Post Office.

WHY PRIVATISATION? The Post Office is a successful public sector organisation, reporting £306 million in profits last month. 1994 is the 18th successive year of subsidy free profits and last year the Treasury scooped £182 million from the Post Office. It is estimated that the sell-off will raise £2bn and my own view is that privatisation is being proposed to generate money for future pre election tax cuts and not in any sense to improve services.

The Post Office has argued for greater commercial freedom. I agree with this, but it can easily be delivered while keeping the organisation in the public sector.

Those wishing to register their views, should write to Michael Heseltine MP at the House of Commons by Friday 30th September l994 or to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who will pass comments on.

For Immediate Release: 4 July 1994
186/94

COUNCIL SHAKE UP IN JEOPARDY

The Government's shake up of local authorities could stall according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, who was chairing a seminar at last week's Association of District Councils conference in Harrogate, warned the range of opinion hostile to the proposals was extending day by day.

Prentice said: "The Government has left key issues affecting staff up in the air to the extent that many people don't know if they are coming or going. The town hall trade unions are all saying the review should be abandoned."

The MP, who chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's backbench Environment Committee, continued: "The conduct of the review has been disastrous from start to finish and Sir John Banham should have been given the red card long ago."

"However, here in Lancashire, we are now into the consultation period on the Local Government Commission's proposals and it is important local people speak out. I have always argued for a unitary Pendle on its present boundaries but that, unfortunately, is not on offer. It is either joining up with Burnley and Rossendale or staying with what we've got - a two tier system with all its imperfections but one that is, at least, familiar."

"I ask myself how the Government got itself into this mess. The answer is crystal clear. They didn't give clear instructions to the Local Government Commission at the outset. They then chopped and changed the guide-lines in the middle of the whole exercise. And then it was all speeded up. The Tories have been responsible for every local government reorganisation since the war and every time they've screwed things up."

The MP added: "We have made our position clear. The Opposition will withdraw its support for the Review if any of the five key principles we laid down earlier is breached."

more follows

Council Shake up

Note to Editors: Set out below are the five key principles which the Labour Opposition set out in the debate on the Isle of Wight Order - the first of the Commission's recommendations laid before Parliament for approval.

• that the Review will be thorough and genuinely cover the country as a whole; that there will be no 'cherrypicking' of areas such as Cleveland, Humberside, Derbyshire or Avon; that the Review will be completed; that recommendations will be acted upon; and that consistent principles will be adopted throughout.

• that there should be no gerrymandering of specific boundaries for narrow, party political advantage.

• that in shadow authorities there should be all-out elections from day one.

• that in subsequent years a third of the Council should be up for election annually.

• that the Government should meet the reasonable representations made to them by the Staff Commission about the way in which staff are treated when their jobs have been changed as part of the reorganisation.

For Immediate Release: 4 July 1994
187/94

MP CLAIMS MINISTERS ARE "FOOT DRAGGING" OVER MAD COW DISEASE

The Government is dragging its feet in the fight to eradicate BSE claims local MP, Gordon Prentice. BSE - commonly known as mad cow disease - attacks the brains of cattle turning them to a spongy texture.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "No-one wants to create unnecessary alarm about this dreadful disease but it is as plain as a pikestaff that the Government is not acting quickly and purposefully enough to stamp it out."

"It took the Government 18 months from discovering the disease to make it notifiable, 20 months to introduce a compulsory slaughter and compensation scheme, Two and a half years to announce the ban on cattle offal for human consumption, and a further 5 months to implement it. It was 18 months after

the introduction of compulsory slaughter that full compensation was introduced. I am sure the under-compensation paid from August 1988 to February 1990 must have deterred farmers from declaring suspect BSE cases."

"The Government is clearly not doing everything it can to protect consumers. The announcement a few days ago that the intestines and thymus of calves under 6 months would be banned from human food is a welcome start. However, the brains, spinal cords and other offal of these calves are still going into human food."

"These so-called *specified offals* of cattle aged over six months are prevented by law from entering human food. In July 1990 the House of Commons Agriculture Select Committee recommended that the Government include calf offal in the sales ban. The Government have consistently refused to do this."

more follows

Mad Cow Disease

Note to Editors: Numbers. 128,879 cases of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy ("mad cow disease") have been confirmed on 31,395 UK farms from November 1986, when the disease was first identified, to 13 May 1994. 27% of UK herds have experienced at least one case of BSE (58% of dairy herds, and 13% of beef suckler herds)

Up to lO May 1994, 9,967 cases of BSE had been confirmed in animals born after the ruminant feed bans, imposed on 18 July 1988 in Britain and 11 January 1989 in N Ireland. MAFF states "the majority of these had probably been exposed to ruminant protein in feed".

Costs 1987-1993 To the end of 1993, BSE cost the UK taxpayer £150.1 million, including £96m in slaughter compensation.

Germany On 28 June 1994 Germany announced plans for a six-month ban on UK beef imports either directly or via third countries, except from cattle under 3yrs old from herds which have been free of BSE for the last four years. The European Commission has previously said it is prepared to take out an injunction against such a ban. Germany's 16 states had already agreed to ban slaughter of UK cattle except those imported after 1 July 1990 if UK authorities certify they come from BSE-free herds and were not fed ruminant protein.

The Opposition has not supported a unilateral German ban on UK beef. Support for such a ban would imply support for a global ban on UK beef. This has never been Labour's position. However, this is a timely reminder to the UK Government that their first priority must be the protection of the human population. There is as yet no proof that BSE can or cannot cause diseases such as Creuzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in humans. The Government are still not taking all the steps available to them to protect consumers.

Deregulation In May 1978 the Labour Government produced proposed Protein Processing Orders, to greatly tighten up the regulations on the processing of animal proteins for food - 'rendering'.

In April 1980, the Conservative Government abandoned these proposals, bringing in their own far weaker measures, stating that "the new proposals reflect the wish of Ministers that in the present economic climate the industry should itself determine how best to produce a high-quality product...'

It is considered to be no coincidence that it was at just this time that many rendering plants switched from the old hatch system using organic solvent extraction to a new continuous sytem - a move which may well have allowed the emergence of BSE.

For Immediate Release: 4 July 1994
188/94

PENDLE MP BACKS RSPCA ANIMAL WELFARE CAMPAIGN

The RSPCA campaign to limit the amount of time animals are on the road being transported from farm to abattoir is being backed by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "I've had an enormous postbag on this issue prompted in part no doubt by the RSPCA's very effective newspaper ads which highlight the miserable conditions which too many animals have to suffer."

"The Government's own Farm Animal Welfare Council recommend a maximum interval of 12 hours before feeding, resting and watering. The RSPCA say no animal should travel longer than eight hours to a slaughter house."

"Slaughter should occur as near as possible to the point of production. I want to see a maximum journey time of eight hours for animals travelling across Europe. If, as I hope, this is accepted by the Government, we will all need to work to ensure that the UK industry is not unfairly disadvantaged in Europe."

"We need much more effective control of all those involved in the commercial handling of livestock" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: Between 1985 and 1992 there was a 991% increase in the number of live farm animals exported from the UK for slaughter or further fattening - from 164,719 in 1985 to 1,797,034 in 1992. This included 420,620 calves and 1,373,657 sheep. According to the Financial Times, there was a further increase of around 50% in exports in 1993 to an estimated 3 million animals.

Current UK legislation
UK law has already been weakened. Before 1 January 1993, animals were allowed to travel for a maximum of 12 hours before feeding, watering and

resting, unless the journey could be completed in 15 hours. The Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1992 increased the maximum interval from 12hrs to 15hrs. The requirement for animal exports to be fed, rested for 10 hours and inspected near the port of export was also scrapped on 1 January 1993.

European law
There is currently a European maximum interval of 24hrs before feeding, resting and watering. Proposals brought forward in July 1993 under Directive 91/628/EEC on the Protection of Animals During Transport were largely weaker than UK law - including a 24 hour maximum interval before feeding and resting many animals, and no maximum intervals for sheep. These proposals were rejected. A Presidency compromise reducing the 24 hours limit to a 22 hour interval for feeding and resting of all animals was also rejected in December 1993. The UK was one of the opposing states.

The Greek Presidency put forward a proposal to be voted on at the meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers on Monday 20 June 1994. Again, the proposal stipulated feeding and resting intervals of 22 hours for all animals.

Germany, Denmark and Holland were all expected to vote against the proposals - the addition of the UK could have provided the blocking minority. Labour publicly petitioned the Government to do so.

UK Government U-turn
Nicholas Soames, Parliamentary Secretary, stated on 16 June that these proposals were 'a great step forward for animal welfare in the Community', and went on to indicate support for the proposals.

On the morning of 20 June, at the final pre-meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, Belgium indicated that they were unhappy. It was then clear that if the UK Government voted for the Greek proposals, they would not only be voting with those states that had lined up against animal welfare legislation, but would also be on the losing side.

In an attempt to save face on animal welfare, the UK Government did an about-turn, and indicated at the Council of Ministers that they did not support the proposal. Labour has accused Ministers of duplicity and scant regard for the welfare of animals.

The proposal remains on the table. The Commission have been asked to bring back a report by 1 July 1995 setting out proposals for journey limits.

For Immediate Release: 5 July 1994
189/94

MP SENDS A MESSAGE TO ROYAL MAIL OVER BARLICK DELIVERY OFFICE ROW

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has stepped into the furious row over the future of the Royal Mail delivery office in Barnoldswick. In Preston, this Friday the MP will be meeting Steve Geldard, the Delivery Area Manager, who is masterminding the proposed changes.

News that the Post Office is looking at plans for the area which could involve the closure of the town's delivery office sparked an outcry from local people who are determined to retain the service.

Prentice said: "I have been inundated with letters protesting about the possible closure of the delivery office. And I've had an avalanche of petitions from over 2,500 local people. That is a very large slice of the town's adult population."

"The town has seen a stream of closures over recent years. For the Royal Mail to go really would be the last straw."

For Immediate Release: 7 July 1994
190/94

MP PREDICTS "VERY CHANGEABLE"
SUMMER FORECAST

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has dubbed the Treasury's "Summer Economic Forecast" a dull and gloomy document. "The outlook is likely to be very changeable" quipped the MP.

The Summer Forecast, published last week, is a new publication brought about by the move to a unified Budget. Economic growth this year and next is expected to be 2.75%, up a little from the Budget prediction of 2.5%.

Underlying inflation, excluding mortgage payments, is forecast to be 2.5% this year, considerably lower than the Budget prediction of 3.25%. It is expected to rise to 2.75% next year.

The current account deficit on the balance of payments for 1993 is now predicted to be £11 billion, up a little from the £9.5 billion forecast in the Budget. The forecast for this year and next year's deficit stays the same at £9.5 billion, 1.5% of GDP.

The PSBR for 1993/4 was £46 billion, £4 billion lower than the Budget forecast. Even so, the expected PSBR for this year has only been reduced by £2 billion to £36 billion (5.25% of GDP), falling to £28 billion (4% of GDP) next year.

The MP commented: "The Chancellor presents these figures as a justification for masterly inactivity. He says *"we have quite the best combination of circumstances ...I can remember for a very long time"*. Despite this optimism the economy still faces £7 billion of tax rises planned for next year. Moreover, at this stage of a recovery, growth of 2.75% is much lower than most other countries would expect. The OECD estimates the US economy will grow by 4% this year. Our economy has been so weakened by the recession that the Chancellor cannot increase growth without re-igniting inflation. 2.75% growth is the limit of his ambitions."

Summer Forecast "very changeable"

"There has been much speculation - especially from the Tory right - about the possibility of tax cuts. This speculation comes at a time when millions of British people are already seeing their living standards fall due to this year's tax rises, and there are another ten tax rises still to come."

The MP added: "The Chancellor may try to save the Tories necks in the lead up to the next election by introducing politically motivated tax cuts financed by measures such as the privatisation of the Post Office. But the Tories can never regain the trust of the British people on tax when, as even the Chancellor admits, they have raised taxes by the equivalent of a 7p increase in the basic rate of income tax. If there is any room for tax cuts the Chancellor should start by cancelling next year's increase in VAT on fuel from 8 to 17.5%."

For Immediate Release: 11 July 1994
191/94

RE-THINK POSSIBLE ON BARLICK DELIVERY OFFICE ROW

The threatened closure of the Royal Mail delivery office in Barnoldswick has been put on hold following a meeting last Friday between local MP, Gordon Prentice, and Steve Geldard, the Post Office chief responsible for deliveries in North East Lancashire.

Prentice said afterwards: "Mr Geldard guaranteed there would be no quick and irrevocable decisions by the Royal Mail concerning the future of the delivery office. In fact, he went further than that and told me the Royal Mail had not ruled out staying in Barnoldswick - but he would be searching for another location. I knew this was the position but it was reassuring to hear it from the horse's mouth, so to speak. He said the town centre site had a number of drawbacks. There was no proper loading bay and the mail had to be hauled up to the first floor for sorting."

"Clearly, local people up in arms about the threatened closure and I am relieved no rash decisions are going to be made. I have a bundle of petitions with the names of 2,500 local people. I want the Royal Mail to listen to local concerns and I want to see proper consultation with the post office unions. The whole business must be given a thorough airing so everybody understands the issues involved."

"The Royal Mail isn't the National Grid. Our Post Office has a warm and re-assuring public image - and it does an excellent job. To risk that reputation for, as yet, unquantified benefits would be foolhardy."

For Immediate Release: 11 July 1994
192/94

MP TO MEET ROLLS ROYCE DIRECTORS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet the Chairman, Sir Ralph Robins, and senior Board members of Rolls Royce this Wednesday (13 July) to discuss the company's business strategy and its plans for the future. The MP will be

joining other colleagues from constituencies across the country where the company has plants.

Tomorrow (Tuesday 12 July), the Pendle MP will be meeting Dick Evans, the Chief Executive of British Aerospace, Hugh Colver (Head of Communications) and Peter McLoughlin (Government Relations Director, BAe) to discuss the future of the aerospace industry.

Prentice said: "The Rolls Royce meeting comes on the back of an earlier one held with the Rolls Royce trade unions at the House of Commons on 16 March. There are deep concerns about the way the industry is going. It's time for some straight talking.

The meeting with the Rolls Royce unions in March secured the Pendle MP's backing for the 19 key recommendations from the Commons Trade and Industry Select Committee which are designed to secure the future of the industry. The unions want the Government to increase aid to aerospace and give more energetic backing to aerospace companies. They also want the Government to do more work on defence conversion.

193/94 For Immediate Release: 13 July 1994

PENDLE MP SLAMS POST SELL-OFF

The Government has no mandate for the privatisation of the Post Office according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He told the Commons last night that the sell-off was not even hinted at in the Conservative's 1992 Election manifesto. Parliament, he said, should not allow it.

The MP told the House the whole exercise was ideologically driven and was not about improving efficiency or effectiveness. He said: "According to the latest annual report, which has just been published, this year's profit amounted to £306m. It was the 18th successive year of subsidy-free profit. The external financing limit target of £181m was bettered; the Post Office contributed £182m to the Treasury coffers. Since 1981, more than £1 billion has been paid over by the Post Office to the rest of the public sector."

The MP said: "Let me tell Conservative Members that the general public feel deep unease and scepticism and the Government will have cause to regret this privatisation. Last year, when the automated credit transfer system posed a threat to sub-post offices, I was inundated with protests: 7,000 people in my constituency, which has an electorate of 65,000, signed petitions which I delivered to 10 Downing Street. The response to the current privatisation threat will be much greater."

"Those sub-postmasters and postmistresses were not only concerned about automated credit transfer; they were straining at the leash to provide services that the Government have not hitherto allowed sub-post offices to provide. They wanted to act as agents for banks and building societies, and to sell tickets for various events. Yet, for months, we witnessed the absurd fiasco of the Government agonising over whether to allow sub-post offices to provide fishing licences. It is the stuff of a hall of mirrors."

For Immediate Release: 12 July 1994

194/94

PRENTICE BACKS FREEDOM FOOD

The RSPCA's "Freedom Food" initiative has won the backing of local MP, Gordon Prentice, who will be at the campaign's Westminster launch on Thursday. The campaign - which has the support of some of the country's leading retailers - will promote food that has come from animals reared and treated humanely and with respect.

The MP said: "The RSPCA has done a marvellous job over the years in bringing animal welfare issues to the attention of the public and I applaud this latest venture. It will provide information to an increasingly discriminating public."

"Farm animals have an existence other than as a source of human food. They should be well treated and should be allowed to do the things that come naturally to them. Pigs, for example, should be able to root around."

"I know from my postbag that young people especially take animal welfare issues seriously. They are absolutely right to do so."

195/94: For Immediate Release: 11 July 1994

MP FURIOUS AS WATER CHIEFS RULE OUT EARLY ACTION ON "LEAKIEST MAIN IN LANCASHIRE"

The water main in Foulridge - dubbed the leakiest mains in Lancashire by local MP, Gordon Prentice - will not be replaced before the 1995/6 financial year says North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher. The MP was hoping the intervention of the water industry watchdog, OFWAT, would speed things up.

The MP said: "I met the customer relations people from OFWAT only a few days ago and I was keeping my fingers crossed that North West Water would respond to the legitimate concerns of their customers in Foulridge whose water main is about as useful as a colander."

The company told me *"the local OFWAT office understandably follows through those individual problems about which it receives complaints. In deciding the priorities for mains replacement we take account of the broader picture across the region. The situation remains that we will be carrying out the higher priority projects in the current year and we will be unable to start the Foulridge project before the 1995/6 financial year."*

The MP commented: "Foulridge is home to one of the leakiest mains in Lancashire. It burst twice in 1988, once in 1991, once in 1992 and three times in 1993. Now the people there have been told the replacement may not be laid until, conceivably, March 1996! Heaven knows what state the mains are in elsewhere in Lancashire but even OFWAT pressed for speedier action.

"The record of North West Water in extracting cash from its customers is awesome. I want to see tougher regulation of the privatised water companies such as North West Water which last year made profits of £1.6 billion.

"This profit amounts to £80 per household around the country.
North West Water in our own area made a profit of £269 million last

MP TURNS ON NORTH WEST WATER

year - up 9%. They've put their dividends up 8% and over recent years they've been raising directors' salaries like there's no tomorrow.

"One in five bathing beaches in England and Wales continue to fail European health standards. Beaches at well-known resorts in the North West from Blackpool to Morecambe are among those that fail. With the sunshine of summer and the holiday season now upon us, thousands of local people will be heading for the seaside. But at many beaches they'd be well advised to think twice before going into the water. The sooner the sewage outfalls are properly cleaned up, the better. And that's the task the water companies should be concentrating on, not the ever-rising bonanza for their shareholders."

For Immediate Release: 11 July 1994
196/94

COST OF RAIL SELL-OFF SOARS says PRENTICE

The cost of rail privatisation is soaring out of control according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP has been an outspoken critic of the Government's handling of the signal staffs' dispute. Prentice says the specifically identified cost of rail privatisation to date has risen to £685 million and is set to exceed £700 million.

"The whole exercise has been a scandalous waste of public money. In my own constituency, the state of the track is appalling and we need more investment in the infrastructure - not more promises of future action. That £685 million squandered on privatisation represents almost the entire total cost of modernising the West Coast Main Line" fumed the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: A Parliamentary Answer from Roger Freeman on 21 March 1994 gave an initial estimate of £146 million being spent by British Rail on preparations for privatisation in the years 1992-93 to 1994-95.

That included an estimate of £56 million for 1993-94. However, on 5 July 1994 British Rail's new Annual Report revealed that that Parliamentary Answer had underestimated the cost. British Rail had actually spent £92 million on preparations for rail privatisation in 1993-94.

The updated cost of privatisation to British Rail in the three years 1992-93 to 1994-95 is therefore now as follows -

Year	Amount
1992-3	£10m
1993-4	£92m
1994-5	£80m

Total	£182m

In addition, a Parliamentary Answer from Roger Freeman on 31 March 1994 revealed that since the Railways Bill was published in January 1993, British Rail has also spent £303 million on redundancy and early retirement in preparation for privatisation.

British Rail currently estimates that it will need at least an additional £50 million each year for the direct costs of rail privatisation in both 1995-96 and 1996-97, adding a further £100 million to British Rail's costs. These estimates are likely to be exceeded.

The total identified cost of rail privatisation to British Rail for the period 1992-93 to 1996-97, excluding any future redundancy costs, is therefore £585 million. This compares with Labour's initial estimate in March 1994 of £346 million.

THE COST TO THE TAXPAYER On top of this, the Department of Transport itself is squandering huge sums on privatisation. The Department of Transport's Annual Report shows that Government spending on preparations for privatisation is as follows -

Year	Amount
1992-93	£6 million
1993-94	£12 million
1994-95	£12 million
1995-96	£10 million
1996-97	£8 million
Total	£48million

In addition, the cost to the Department of Transport for the newly-created Office of Passenger Rail Franchising will be £32 million between 1993-94 and 1996-97.

The cost of the Office of the Rail Regulator over the same period will be £20 million. This means that the total additional cost of rail privatisation to the Department of Transport will be £100 million. This estimate is likely to be exceeded.

Taken together with the £585 million additional costs to British Rail, it means that the total identified rail privatisation bill to the national taxpayer currently stands at £685 million and is likely to be exceeded.

WHAT COULD THE MONEY HAVE BOUGHT? Not a single penny of that £685 million has been, or will be, spent on trains, tracks, signalling or stations. On top of going to make useful people redundant, this money continues to be poured into the pockets of management consultants and banks paid by the Tories to carry out studies, some of them inconclusive, into how privatisation might or might not work.

This money could have been spent instead on improving services for passengers. £685 million would buy -

up to 57 new InterCity trains at £12-15 million each, or

up to 274 Network SouthEast electric units at £2.5 million each, or up to 342 locomotives at £2-£2.5 million each, or

up to 13 major signalling schemes at £50 -£60 million each.

Put another way, £685 million represents almost the entire total cost of modernising the West Coast Main Line between Euston and Crewe. It covers almost six times the cost of electrifying the Midland Main Line between Bedford and Sheffield. It is almost seven times the cost of electrifying the Edinburgh to Aberdeen line. Instead it has been frittered away by the Government In the context of the rail dispute, £685 million is almost 140 times the cost of the 5.7 per cent pay offer made by Railtrack to the signal workers and vetoed by the Government.

PAYING FOR CONSULTANTS In many cases the £685 million wasted on rail privatisation has been spent on unworkable schemes and failed consultants. For example, Coopers and Lybrand were paid £1. 6 million to advise on a system of access charging by Railtrack. They twice reported back that they were unable to do so before producing the formula which has led to such consternation among train operators about the future financing of the railway. The Department of Transport has now dispensed with their services. Dewe Rogerson A Parliamentary Answer on 3 May 1994 from Roger Freeman revealed that Dewe Rogerson were paid £611,000 inclusive of VAT up to May 1994 to advise on the appropriate marketing strategy for rail privatisation.

On 12 May 1994 the Department of Transport appointed another firm to take their place. Dewe Rogerson are currently continuing to be paid by the Department of Transport as they work out their notice, to be completed on 12 August 1994. The total bill for Dewe Rogerson's work has yet to be revealed.

Shandwick plc Shandwick plc were the firm which ousted Dewe Rogerson and are now employed jointly by the Department of Transport and the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising. Shandwick has been asked by OPRAF to "act as marketing communications advisers". In addition, Shandwick has been asked to assist the Department of Transport on *"residual general rail privatisation marketing issues."*

As yet there are no figures available for the amount paid to Shandwick by OPRAF and the Department of Transport. In a Parliamentary Answer on 30 June, Roger Freeman said "Payment will be by reference to hourly rates for work done. For commercial reasons it is not the practice to disclose these rates."

A recent letter from the Department of Transport has revealed that since being appointed in April 1994, there have been seventeen separate meetings held between Department of Transport or OPRAF officials and Shandwick.

CONCLUSION The Government's initial predictions of the cost of rail privatisation have been woefully inaccurate. The cost of rail privatisation is rocketing skyward whilst passengers and employees suffer. It is a scandalous waste of taxpayers' money to which Labour is totally opposed.

197/94: For Immediate Release: 11 July 1994

SIGNAL DISPUTE "SABOTAGED" BY GOVERNMENT says PENDLE MP

The Government provoked the rail dispute by sabotaging the deal which had been reached between Railtrack and the RMT says local MP, Gordon Prentice. As the dispute enters its fifth week, the MP says the Government's fingerprints are all over the negotiations.

The MP said: "At first the Government denied this, but they have now been forced to admit how they interfered and in particular how they prevented both sides reaching an interim deal of 5.7 per cent at a cost of £5 million.

"On the figures I have seen, the cost of the pay deal seems to have been more than offset by productivity gains over the period to which the deal applies. Since 1983, total signalling operating costs have fallen from £162 million to £136 million. The number of signal boxes fell from 1,330 in 1986 to 1,160 in April 1994. Over the last ten years, whilst the total number of train miles has increased by 7.8%, the number of signal staff has fallen by 25%."

"The boss of Railtrack, Robert Horton, and the Railtrack chief negotiator were so confident that the interim deal of 5.7 per cent was within Government guidelines that they both went on holiday. They expected no controversy" said Prentice.

Note to Editors: The Government claims that the deal would break their public sector pay guide-lines. The Government's guide-lines were laid down by Chancellor Kenneth Clarke on 14 September 1993. This is what he said -

"The Government will expect any increase in pay to be offset by productivity improvements. There will be no formal limit on settlements and different arrangements may apply to different groups...In an increasingly competitive world all pay increases have to be earned".

198/94: For Immediate Release: 11 July 1994

HEALTH CHIEFS CAVE IN OVER HARTLEY HOSPITAL SALE PRICE

Hartley Hospital in Colne - left in perpetuity to the people of the town by the jam magnate, Sir William Pickles Hartley and empty since 1989 - was sold by the North West Regional Health Authority to the builders and developers, Ribble Industrial Estates, for £325,000.

The selling price was revealed in a letter from Chairman of the North Western Regional Health Authority, Sir Donald Wilson, to local MP, Gordon Prentice, who has been campaigning for months for this information to be made public.

The MP said: "I knew eventually I would winkle this information out of the health service bureaucracy. But it has taken an enormous amount of effort just to get this far. Sir Donald first refused to tell me the price - hiding behind bogus "commercial confidentiality". The Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, then refused to say."

"Last week I tabled a motion in the House of Commons saying the secrecy over the sale price served no useful purpose given the sale had gone through and was completed. I said the whole business sat very uneasily with the Prime Minister's professed belief in open government. In fact, only last week I tabled

a Parliamentary Question to the Prime Minister asking him to tell me the sale price."

In a bizarre twist to the story, Sir Donald urges the MP to bear in mind the continuing need for "commercial confidentiality" *to protect the interests of the purchaser*."

"The MP said: "What about the interests of the public? This is real hall of mirrors stuff. I have no intention of keeping the sale price under wraps. What conceivable purpose could be served by that? In fact I have today written to the Secretary of State for Health asking her if she will now make it her general policy for all large

Hartley Hospital sold for £325,000

NHS asset sales (such as hospitals) to be separately itemised in the accounts of the Regional Health Authorities. I am also in touch with the Accounting Standards Board and the Audit Commission to get their views on how the published accounts of the NHS can be made more transparent."

"There is a corrosive culture of secrecy in this country that simply must be challenged. The next chapter in this whole drama will be about the future use of Hartley Hospital. I wait, with some interest, to hear of the intentions of the new owners."

Note to Editors: The letter from Sir Donald to the MP reads: *"In view of your continuing interest in Hartley Hospital, now that the property sale has been completed and our professional adviser has no objection to this information being released I can now confirm that the sale price of the property was £325,000.*

"I am sure you will bear in mind that the financial details of individual transactions should remain confidential to protect the interest of the purchaser."

199/94: For Immediate Release: 11 July 1994

MP JOINS BATTLE OVER TV LICENCE FEE FOR OLD FOLK

The decision of the TV Licence Office to slap the full TV Licence fee on Pendle pensioners in sheltered accommodation has stunned local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP has promised to do all he can to reverse the decision.

The MP said: "For many elderly people, the television is their window on the world and the result of this ruling could mean blank screens for some of our old folk."

"I don't know how or why this has happened but I am now in touch with the town hall and the TV licence people to see what can be done to put things to right."

"What a terrible shock this must be for these pensioners. For people who are working, £84.50p is a tidy sum to find but for those struggling on a pension it is a small fortune."

200/94 July 1994 Number 3

ABOUT THE HOUSE
with Gordon Prentice MP

IN THE SALT MINES OF WESTMINSTER

Your very own Member of Parliament spends every Tuesday at 4.30pm upstairs in Room 7 on the Committee Corridor, closeted with assorted peers of the realm and MPs with an eye for detail in the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. It is the Parliamentary equivalent of the gulag. A place where troublesome MPs are banished. A place to do penance for getting on the wrong side of the whips.

I am there for a different reason although I really don't know if I'll be able to stand it for much longer without going completely round the bend. After the tragic death of my colleague, Bob Cryer, who was killed in a car accident some months ago, I volunteered to take his place on this Committee which he had chaired for a number of years with great distinction. My colleagues in the Parliamentary Labour Party acclaimed this selfless act. Indeed, they dubbed it "heroic" and, with the Whip's blessing, voted me on to the Committee.

I wanted to get on this Committee because I am genuinely interested in the process by which our laws are made. I have always suspected there is much wrong with the way we legislate. Now I know.

There is no better place to witness the sheer, unrelenting volume of legislation passing through this place before it is deposited on the unsuspecting world outside.

The main Acts of Parliament spawn thousands of pieces of secondary legislation - the Statutory Instruments - which go into the fine detail often neglected by the primary Acts. These SIs, as they are known in the jargon, have the full force of law and come shooting out of the Whitehall sausage machine faster than the speed of light.

The Statutory Instruments Committee has the responsibility of making sure (a) the SIs make sense and (b) they cover matters within the scope of the main Act of Parliament. Still with me? Haven't nodded off yet? Good.

Over the course of the Parliamentary year about 2,000 SIs pass before the glazed eyes of Committee Members. I get a pile about five inches thick at the weekend for the Tuesday meeting and there is simply not the hours in the day (and night) to read all this stuff. So what do I do? I dip into it, thinking of a question or two to keep the officials on their toes. Pulling out of the great

wadge of paper, SIs on subjects I happen to know a tiny bit about. On most of them I know absolutely nothing.

Take this sample from last Tuesday's offering. We had the Parental Orders (Human Fertilisation and Embryology) Regulations 1994 (interesting) and the Enrolment of Deeds (Fees) Regulations 1994 (not very interesting). Then we had bizarre SI's in Welsh and others in English so tortuous they might as well have been written in Welsh. We have advisers to advise but it is advisable to be critical of their advice. If you see what I mean.

We considered the Household Appliances (Noise Emission) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 and looked at the Education (School Performance Information) (England) Regulations 1994 and agreed or annulled 62 other SIs and memoranda of one kind or another. It's a workload unmatched and unrivalled by any other Committee.

Parliament is suffering from legislative indigestion. Trying to do too much and doing it badly. The answer, I believe, is to devolve more powers back to local communities leaving Westminster to do what it alone can do. (That's got you scratching your head!)

Think of me as I hew away in the legislative salt mines of Westminster. I day-dream the impossible. I see in my minds eye the Abolition of Statutory Instruments (Amendment) (England) Regulations 1994 and I laugh like a hyena.

Gordon Prentice MP
11 July 1994

201/94: For Immediate Release: 12 July 1994

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR AN END TO THE BLOODBATH IN KASHMIR

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to end the abuse of human rights in Kashmir. He says the international community seems paralysed and is unwilling to act.

Prentice said: "I have seen the most damning evidence of atrocities in Kashmir and it is time the international spotlight was trained on this bloodstained corner of the world."

"I have many constituents in Pendle who despair at the terrible savagery which is now commonplace there. I am joining with other colleagues here in the Commons to press for concerted action to end this dispute which is still unresolved after half a century."

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads: That this House welcomes the joint initiative taken by the All Party British Parliamentary Kashmir Group, the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, the Congressional Human Rights Foundation and parliamentarians in a number of other countries in reminding the world community that the Kashmir dispute remains unresolved and that the abuse of human rights and loss of innocent lives continues; calls on all parties to the dispute to abide by international standards of human rights and humanitarian law and cease extra-judicial killings, torture and other

malpractices; urges the Indian Government to restore the due process of law and recommend and support the initiative of independent and non-governmental organisations in monitoring against human rights abuses; and calls on the governments of both India and Pakistan to recognise and respond to the call for self-determination, a right which was historically promised but has yet to be exercised by the people of Kashmir and to re-activate the role of the United Nations as a catalyst in this process which would include the full participation of the Kashmiri people.

203/94: For Immediate Release: 13 July 1994

NO CHANGE IN PENDLE JOBLESS TOTAL

The number of people unemployed in Pendle and claiming benefit (the claimant count) stood at 2,734 in June compared with 2,742 for May. The unemployment rate is 7.3%

Of the June total, 2,095 men were out of work and claiming benefit (9.7%) and 639 women (4%). Vacancies were up at the Job Centres in Colne and Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "There is some hope now that the Government is at least talking about the desirability of full employment. It wasn't so very long ago that the nation was told that unemployment was a price well worth paying..."

"The June figure for Pendle is 1,026 higher than the figure the Prime Minister inherited from his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher."

204/94: Embargoed: 21 July 1994

PENDLE CONSTITUENCY TO REMAIN UNCHANGED

The Parliamentary Boundary Commission has recommended that the constituency of Pendle should remain unchanged. The decision follows the public inquiry held in Preston in November and December last year which examined the distribution of seats in Lancashire.

The Press Release issued by the Commission says: "The Commission's proposal to transfer Read, Sabden, and Simonstone from Ribble Valley to Pendle met with a flood of protest. There was also significant opposition from electors within Pendle who wished to see their seat remain coterminous with the borough. The Commission acknowledge that the three wards clearly have a strong affinity with Ribble Valley and accept that they be retained in Ribble Valley as recommended by the Assistant Commissioner. The Commission therefore now propose that the current Pendle constituency remain unaltered. They recognise that the electorate of this seat would be the lowest in the county, but consider this is justifiable in order to avoid breaking the strong local ties and breaking the borough boundary."

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, welcomed the decision. "My thanks go to all the thousands of local people who made their views known to the Commission. It is clearly sensible for Pendle to stay on its present boundaries."

For Immediate Release: 15 July 1994
205/94

BBC NORTHWESTMINSTER

The "Parliamentary Questions for Cash" affair will feature on the BBC2 North West regional Parliamentary programme Northwestminster this Sunday (17 July) at 12.00 noon.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be giving his views on this and other current issues.

Northwestminster is on air from 12noon - 12.30pm.

206/94: For Immediate Release: 18 July 1994

BBC RESPONDS TO MP's TV CAMPAIGN

The BBC has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, they need help to locate people living in his Pendle constituency who do not receive BBC North West TV programmes. The BBC's response comes after months of campaigning by the MP who claims a quarter of his constituents cannot receive vital local news but, instead, get programmes beamed in from Leeds which covers an area stretching to the North Sea.

A year ago, the MP complained that people in areas such as Barnoldswick (where he lives) and Earby "have more chance finding out what's happening locally by reading the tea leaves in their tea cups than by turning on the TV."

"People tell me they are fed up hearing news about Lincoln and Scunthorpe and getting nothing at all about North East Lancashire. However, I don't want people to lose the programmes they are already getting from Leeds - but I do want them to have a choice."

"The BBC have told me they are trying to find a way to improve transmitter coverage for BBC North West programmes. I have passed on information about those areas that can only get Leeds programmes but, clearly, I do not have all the details."

"My message to Pendle's frustrated TV viewers is this. If you can't get BBC North West - and you want to - write to Terry Glasstone, Engineering Officer, at the BBC, PO Box 27, Oxford Road, Manchester M60 1SJ. If enough people do this he will be able to plot a map of Pendle where the screens are forever tuned to Leeds."

207/94: For Immediate Release: 18 July 1994

MP BLASTS NOISY NEIGHBOURS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted Pendle's noisy neighbours. He said the racket - particularly bad in the summer months - was driving the victims up the wall.

The MP said: "During the course of the year I get a steady stream of people driven to distraction by blaring stereo systems or dogs that bark in the middle of the night."

"I've been in touch with the Town Hall to ask for the introduction of a "Party Patrol" but I've been told there is no money for such a service. I know times are hard for local authorities everywhere - and Pendle is as cash strapped as any other - but this is a service people would prize."

"Pity the person whose walls are vibrating from 200 decibels pulsating through the masonry from next door. Noise is pollution and it is about time it was regarded as such - and not a minor irritant."

"We need tougher legislation and tougher enforcement."

208/94: For Immediate Release: 19 July 1994

COURTING TROUBLE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is furious that victims of crime may never get the compensation to which they are entitled. The MP is up in arms over the case of a Barrowford man, Rennie Foster, who was awarded £400 compensation by Reedley Magistrates Court to be paid by the vandals who took away and damaged his car.

The MP said: "The two men responsible have simply refused to pay up and if, as is likely, they are sent to prison then my constituent will never see a penny of his money. A spell in jail wipes the compensation slate clean as far as the criminals are concerned."

"The whole thing is totally wrong. I am in touch with the Lord Chancellor about this and I shall be pressing for the law to be changed. Compensation should be payable even if the person guilty of the crime is sent to jail. If the court hands down a prison sentence, then the state should pay compensation which would then be reclaimed from the person responsible once he or she had done their time."

Note to Editors: The Barrowford man who has yet to receive his compensation is Rennie Foster, 21 Church Street, Barrowford, Lancs BB9 6EB. He has requested publicity.

209/94: For Immediate Release: 19 July 1994

PLANS FOR NHS DENTISTRY "HARD TO SWALLOW" says PENDLE MP

Shock figures released by local MP, Gordon Prentice, reveal that over 40,000 people in the North West de-registered from a dental practice in the two years from 3 July 1992 to 10 June 1994. The Pendle MP dubbed the figures "horrifying".

The figures come days after the publication of the Government's Green Paper "Improving NHS Dentistry" which looks at how the profession is paid and at wider issues of access and availability of dentists to the public.

The MP said: "It is as plain as a pikestaff that NHS dentistry is under threat. Indeed, the very basis of a national dental service has been weakened. Many people simply cannot afford to pay for the treatment they need. I shall be conducting my own survey of dentists in Pendle asking them if the Government's proposals will make it more or less likely they stay in the NHS."

"In some areas of the country it is almost impossible to find a dentist who will take on NHS patients. It is increasingly becoming the norm for dentists to offer their patients private dental insurance through such schemes as Denplan. The crisis in NHS dentistry is pushing people into private health care. A Denplan maintenance scheme costs the average patient £12.00 a month or £144 a year. This fee does not include any treatment for which a laboratory has to be used (a crown or a denture). A denture will, on average, cost the patient £150 and a crown from £70-150."

The MP continued: "Here in the North West, teeth - and the absence of them - is a major concern. In a survey carried out in 1992, five year olds in the North West had twice as many decayed or missing teeth as their counterparts in South West London. And waiting times can be disturbingly lengthy. It takes 113 weeks to see an orthodontist in the North West. A person really shouldn't have to wait that long for specialised treatment."

more follows

Plans for Dentists hard to swallow

Note to Editors: On Thursday 14th July, Virginia Bottomley revealed Government plans for dentistry payments, the system of remuneration or the retention and the reconstruction of a comprehensive NHS dental service. The delay in the publication of the government's response to the Bloomfield report (published in January 1993), has allowed a situation to develop where the NHS dental service is being progressively commercialised and the basis on which NHS treatment is offered to the bulk of the population is being fundamentally changed.

On July 8 1992 a government imposed 7% cut in fees for dentists came into force. This cut sparked the crisis in dentistry which has been continuing for two years. Virginia Bottomley has been in dispute with NHS dentists over the level of their remuneration. Through the mechanism of the new contract with dentists the government had sought to increase dental registration (and therefore throughput) which was in the initial stages very successful. The government responded to pressure for an increase in fee payments to dentists by cutting their fees by 7%.

This encouraged NHS dentists to move into private practice, deregister patients and withdraw from the service. Since the cut in fees 687,765 adult and child patients have been actively deregistered by their NHS dentists. The South has been hardest hit by the crisis. Since the fees cut, 186,151 people have been deregistered in the South West region (all figures are based on the

new regional boundaries). In South Thames region 161,826 people have been deregistered.

In the last few months the crisis has begun to accelerate in the north of England. Since 4 February, Trent region has seen an 18% increase in the number of deregistrations. In five months 6,672 people were deregistered. Northern and Yorkshire region saw a 15% increase, from 50,067 to 57,701 people. These figures do not include those patients who lapse from the dental register at the end of the financial year and are not then re-registered by their dentist. The overall number of registrations compiled by the Dental Practice Board (DPB) includes 'ghost patients' (patients registered twice). The DPB is expected to purge thousands of these double registrations from their lists.

Bloomfield Report Virginia Bottomley set up a review into dental remuneration which was chaired by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, he reported to the Secretary of State on 18 January 1993.

The Bloomfield report made a number of recommendations on dental remuneration. Some of these proposals for initial modification of the present system would be welcomed. These include:

• direct reimbursement of practice rental - to reflect NHS commitment increasing the proportion of fees derived from capitation payments

• incorporating measures to promote quality and increasing resources devoted to quality assurance.

Ultimately, the test of the remuneration system will be whether it protects, preserves and extends the availability of high quality NHS dental services to patients. The Bloomfield report did however make a number of

suggestions which the Labour Party vigorously opposed. Bloomfield suggested removing the exempt status given to pregnant women and nursing mothers. Virginia Bottomley has consistently refused to promise to safeguard these categories.

Another dangerous suggestion is the notion of establishing a purchaser/provider split in such a way that we end up with what amounts to fundholding in the dental service. The likelihood of pushing people into private dental care and the way in which this would move many treatments into dental hospitals (secondary) care.

The Green paper on dentistry is likely to introduce a new tax on teeth by increasing the proportion of the cost of dental treatment paid by patients from 80 per cent to 100 per cent - a 25 per cent. This will mean that the average course of dental treatment will cost an extra eight pounds rising from £28 to £36. The cost of a filling will rise from £8.32 to £10.40 . An extra 25 per cent on the average bill for dental treatment would deter yet more people from going to their dentists. It would mean another new tax on top of the huge tax increases already introduced in April and those planned for next year.

In the event of the Government trying to sugar the pill by returning to free dental check ups, which were withdrawn five years ago, this would in no way compensate for the likely increase in charges (present check ups cost £3.92).

At present the Government raises almost £400 million from dental charges. If the proportional charge rises to 100 per cent an extra £90-100 million would be raised. £60 million of the £400 million is raised from charges for dental examinations.

Health Select Committee Report on Dentistry The Health Select committee published a report on dentistry in June 1993. The report covered the key issues. It argued for the provision of specific items of care (including examination, preventive advice and treatment, maintenance treatment and access to emergency dental care) free at the point of delivery. The report did recognise that for this to be feasible it would result in non-exempt people paying 100% of fees for certain extensive and complicated treatments. However, by retaining an NHS fee scale costs would be regulated.

The committee also argued that free examinations and treatment should continue to be available for pregnant women and mothers for one year after the baby's birth.

Labour's approach Dental disease is one of the commonest and most preventable of all the diseases tackled by our health services. Any oral health strategy should be based on a preventative approach which seeks to reduce caries levels. The primary objective should be dental health promotion, properly evaluated and integrated with other health promotion activities, whilst ensuring access to appropriate services for those who require treatment.

A Labour oral health strategy would also seek to reduce inequalities in dental health. In a survey of 5 year old children in 1991/92, children in the former South West Thames RHA had an average of 1.15 decayed or missing

teeth (DMF), and children in the former North Western RHA had more than twice that, with an average of 2.7.

Sugar based decay is estlmated to cost the NHS nearly £1 billion a year. We believe that diet and development of oral health education programmes are important. Our position in relation to fluoride was spelt out in Health 2000. We will consult on ways to bridge the gap between those who are deeply opposed to any fluoridation of the water supply and those who strongly believe that only in this way can children be protected against the damaging effects of dental caries. New technology may offer real choices to families and individuals but we remain convinced that fluoride is an important simple method of protecting the population from tooth decay.

The Labour Opposition has tabled questions on the issue of mercury in fillings following the Panorama controversy in an effort to discover what research the government is currently undertaking to complement work in other countries.

Orthodontic Treatment Labour's own survey of orthodontic care in July of last year - the first comprehensive survey undertaken - showed that the average wait for a brace is 15 months or 60 weeks, including both the wait for a consultation and the wait for treatment in hospitals.

The responses from the surveyed District Health Authorities showed that all regions had average waiting times for a first consultation for orthodontic treatment longer than the Patient's Charter standard of 13 weeks.

It takes over a year on average to see a consultant and be treated in every English region. In the former North East Thames region it takes an average of 115 weeks, South Western and North Western 113 weeks and North West Thames 99 weeks.

210/94: For Immediate Release: 18 July 1994

MP SHOCKED OVER RAILTRACK'S "GRAVY TRAIN"

With the signal staffs dispute entering its sixth week, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has expressed shock and outrage as details emerge of what he dubs the Railtrack "gravy train".

Speaking at Westminster earlier today the MP said: "Railtrack pays its part-time directors £10,000 a year plus an additional £500 every time they turn up to a Board committee."

"Railtrack's five executive directors are currently preparing a new bonus scheme for themselves. This will be on top of the £1,781,250 which they will be paid between them over the next five years. Try as we might, the Government and Railtrack have so far refused to divulge details of other perks and allowances for directors. For the moment we can only speculate."

The MP said: "The sooner this unnecessary dispute is settled the better. We now know the Transport Secretary, John MacGregor, vetoed a settlement on June 9th. He has admitted as much."

"What kind of Government is it that pays a firm of City lawyers over £5m to do some legal work connected with privatisation of the railways yet vetoes a settlement for the signal staffs that would have cost less than this?"

When challenged in the House of Commons over these perks for Railtrack directors, the Prime Minister pretended not to know about them. He said he would investigate these perks but has so far refused to comment further.

211/94: For Immediate Release: 18 July 1994

MP TO FLUSH OUT DETAILS OF NW WATER'S COMMONS CONSULTANCIES

In the wake of the "Questions for Cash" scandal involving two Tory MPs, Pendle's Gordon Prentice has written to North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher, asking for details of the Parliamentary Consultancy held by Tory MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton.

The MP said: "Those of us who pay grossly inflated water bills to North West Water have a right to know what Sir Malcolm is doing and how much he is getting paid. For all I know he could be doing an excellent job for some token sum. But we need to know."

"Since privatisation, North West Water has increased the average bill by 75% - the second highest increase in the country. The average bill in 1989/90 was £111. This year it is £182."

Note to Editors: The letter to Sir Desmond Pitcher reads:
"I know you will share my concern at recent revelations about Conservative Members of Parliament taking money for tabling Parliamentary Questions. Fortunately, the practice has come to light and the whole sordid issue is being referred to the Committee of Privileges. It beggars belief that this sort of thing has been going on under our very noses and I shall be pressing for this corrupt practice to be outlawed. Our constituents do not send us to Parliament for our palms to be greased by undisclosed private interests.

In the Commons debate last week, concerns were also raised about so-called Parliamentary Consultancies. Although the Register of Interests lists these, there is no indication of the value of these consultancies to the MP nor the nature of the consultancy itself. It has been suggested that this may amount to no more than booking House of Commons dining rooms and hosting the occasional dinner for corporate clients.

It is in this connection I write to you. I understand that Sir Malcolm Thornton MP is a Parliamentary Consultant to your company and I would be grateful if you could let me know what precisely this involves and what remuneration Sir Malcolm receives. In view of what has come to light recently, I think it is in the public interest for this information to be released."

212/94: For Immediate Release: 19 July 1994

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT FOR PENDLE MP

Pendle's Gordon Prentice, a Sky at night fan, is backing moves to keep the night sky dark. The British Astronomical Association and the Council for the Protection of Rural England are campaigning against "light pollution" which makes a starry night a thing of the past.

The MP's move comes in a week of heightened public awareness of galactic happenings. The comet which smashed into the planet Jupiter has created as big a storm amongst Earth's astronomers as it has to the giant planet's atmosphere.

The MP said: "I am certainly supporting the North West Group of Astronomical Societies who are extremely concerned about badly designed external night time lighting. Sending light beaming up into the sky is a waste of money costing millions every year."

"It is absolutely right for our cities, towns and villages to be well lit. But that means training the light where it is required and cutting down on light pollution. Our countryside should be protected from this insidious "sky-glow".

"I like dark skies, moonlit and atmospheric star studded nights" said the MP.

213/94: to 219/94 not used: July 1994

213/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

MP SLAMS NO GO AREAS

213/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

BARROWFORD MAN WINS COMPENSATION

222/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

CRICKET FIASCO

223/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

ANGLING

224/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

TARMAC

225/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

barrowford flooding

227/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

VATs THE PROBLEM

228/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANTS

229/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

INDUSTRY CUTS

230/94: For Immediate Release: July 1994

RAIL TRAVELLERS

231/94: For Immediate Release: 19 August 1994

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN

Pendle's jobless total is up again to 2,814 - a rate of 7.5%. Over the past couple of months the unemployment total has fallen and the latest increase is disappointing says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

"Almost one in ten adult males is out of work and claiming benefit and that is bad news for them and bad news for the country. We need full employment to be at the very centre of Government policy. Instead we are spending millions here in Pendle and nationally to keep people on the dole."

"When the new Parliamentary session resumes in the Autumn, the Government will be pushing through new legislation on the "Jobseeker's Allowance" making life ever more difficult for those who have the misfortune to be unemployed."

Note to Editors: 2,147 men were out of work and claiming benefit (9.9%) and 6677 women (4.2%)

233/94: For Immediate Release: 19 August 1994

ELECTRICITY CHARGES SPARK ANOTHER ROW

The cuts in electricity prices are another con trick according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The recent review of electricity prices produced by Professor Stephen Littlechild, the Electricity Regulator, suggested he ordered price cuts which will cause the typical household's bill to fall dramatically. "Nothing is further from the truth" says Prentice.

"The whole business makes me blow a fuse. The percentage cut of 14% is only being imposed on one third of the household electricity bill. The other two thirds is not touched while the whole of the bill will still carry VAT of 9.5% on 1 April 1995 on top of the 8% the Government slapped on this year."

Here in Pendle in 1993/4 the typical electricity bill for a NORWEB domestic consumer was £283.93. Even with the so called cut of 14% it will rise to £319.69 in April, an increase of £35.76!"

"Where I live in Barnoldswick, we are wired up to Yorkshire Electricity and the figures there are just as bad. The typical bill for a Yorkshire Electricity consumer this year is £278.78. It will rise to £313.89 in April next year - an increase of £35.11p. I am meeting the Yorkshire Electricity people next month to discuss this and other concerns I have about the way this privatised industry is being run."

234/94: For Immediate Release: 19 August 1994

GOVERNMENT IN A JAM OVER MOTORWAY TOLLS

Government plans to introduce tolls on motorways have been roundly condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice. Legislation to allow this is likely to be brought before Parliament in the Autumn.

Prentice said: "The Government's proposal to charge everybody for using motorways is just another new Tory tax. VAT on fuel is set to double and the new insurance and air flight taxes start in the Autumn. And now the Government wants to tax everybody who uses motorways."

The Government doesn't seem to care that it will drive traffic on to other roads where there are more accidents. They don't know how much the tax will raise or how much it will cost to collect. All they know it is another way of penalising motorists and putting up the price of goods."

"People will soon be taxed if they sneeze" said the MP.

235/94: For Immediate Release: 19 August 1994

PRENTICE CALLS FOR NEW LAW TO GIVE RIGHTS TO THE DISABLED

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to launch a petition in support of a Civil Rights Bill for Disabled People which would guarantee basic rights.

The MP said: "There are 6.5 million disabled people in Britain, an average of 10,000 in every Parliamentary constituency. For far too long they have been denied the basic rights that most of us take for granted."

"Earlier this year, the Conservative Government conspired to destroy, by underhand methods, a Civil Rights Bill which had majority support in the House of Commons. To make matters worse they then invented a bogus set of figures to make the Bill appear prohibitively expensive."

"This petition which I am launching in Pendle will make it crystal clear to the Government that what disabled people want is a comprehensive and effective civil rights bill. In other countries disabled people have these rights, why not in Britain?"

The MP is asking for a huge number of signatures for the petition which will be presented to Parliament in the Autumn.

236/94: For Immediate Release: 22 August 1994

PENDLE MP BACKS NEW AEROSPACE PROJECT

The FLA (Future Large Aircraft) project has won the backing of Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice, who wants to see the RAF order a brand new state of the art transport plane rather than buy an off-the-peg updated Hercules from the American aerospace giant, Lockheed.

The RAF's ageing fleet of military transport planes is approaching obsolescence and cash starved military planners are considering whether to update the Hercules, designed in the mid 1950s, or go for a brand new plane designed by a European Consortium with British Aerospace playing a key role.

The Pendle MP said: "Lockheed claim the FLA is an expensive and high risk option and that there is no engine yet. They also say any UK work will be limited to the wing. British Aerospace tell a different story. They say the plane could be ready by 2002 and that Rolls Royce in partnership with BMW has already launched and is testing the BR715 which would form the basis of the engine for the FLA."

Prentice said: "Aerospace is a key high tech sector here in the North West and it is clearly in the region's best interest for the Government to go for the FLA rather than an updated American Hercules. I am pressing Government Ministers to back the FLA."

237/94: For Immediate Release: 19 August 1994

MP BACKS SINGLE TIER COUNCIL

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has told the Local Government Commission - the body set up by the Government to redraw the local authority map of England - that he favours a unitary authority covering Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale but only if there is no possibility of a unitary Pendle on its present boundaries.

The MP said: "The whole review is very much up in the air at the moment and there must be a very good chance that the Government drops it in the new Parliamentary session in the Autumn. It is an issue which has become too hot to handle."

"I believe the two tier system is not transparent enough and that people can be confused about who is responsible for what. I believe in local government which is close to the people and is responsive to their wishes. The two tier system can, I think, be remote."

"For the Liberal Democrats to accuse me of "betrayal" is par for the course for them. They didn't show the slightest interest in the future of the Parliamentary constituency of Pendle which has precisely the same boundaries as the Borough. And I have bulging files of press cuttings where they have slagged off County Hall with the vitriol which is their trademark. For the Liberal Democrats to rediscover the merits of the County Council is rich in irony."

238/94: For Immediate Release: 19 August 1994

STORM IN A TEACUP SUBSIDES

The decision of Pendle Council to allow the owner of the Parish Tea Rooms in Church Street, Colne to serve customers outside has been hailed as a victory for common sense by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says people should be able to enjoy the sunshine and have a cup of tea at a pavement table without the local council acting in a heavy handed way.

"The report to last night's Council Committee didn't even mention the teashop or cafes in general and was written in a very abrupt manner where everything is black and white. What is required is a bit of flexibility and common sense."

"No-one wants council officials to be viewed as late twentieth century obergruppenfuhrers barking orders at local shopkeepers to move their goods indoors. Clearly, if signs or displays or even cafe tables are causing an obstruction then no sensible person would object to their removal. But if there are no problems then the Council should have the discretion - and the good sense - to leave well alone."

"The Council report says they have no discretion in the matter and the law makes no distinction between conventional and pedestrianised streets or, presumably, between narrow and wide pavements. I have therefore written to the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, to ask if the Government plans to review the law concerning these matters."

"This is a real storm in a teacup. The Liberal Democrats who control the council seem to blame anyone and everyone but themselves. It is either County Hall in Preston or over zealous council officials" mused the MP.

239/94: For Immediate Release: 19 August 1994

NW WATER KEEPS QUIET ON PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTANCIES

Attempts by local MP, Gordon Prentice, to flush out details of the Parliamentary Consultancy awarded by North West Water to Tory MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton, have been blocked by the Chairman of the privatised water company, Sir Desmond Pitcher.

Last month, the Pendle MP wrote to the water chief following the "Parliamentary Questions for Cash" scandal involving two Tory MPs. Pendle's Gordon Prentice demanded details of the Parliamentary Consultancy awarded by North West Water to Tory MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton.

Last month the Pendle MP claimed that people in the area who had to pay grossly inflated water bills to North West Water had a right to know what Sir Malcolm was doing and how much he was getting paid. "For all I know he could be doing an excellent job for some token sum. But we need to know" said the MP.

"Sir Desmond has now told me it would be a breach of commercial confidence to disclose the arrangements the company has with a third party. This simply won't wash. People in Pendle who pay through the nose for water and who cannot get their leaky mains repaired or their sewers seen to are not going to take kindly to this stonewalling reply. I am writing directly to Sir Malcolm Thornton MP to see what he has to say for himself and I am making arrangements to meet Sir Desmond Pitcher to discuss this and other matters my constituents have raised with me concerning the deplorable service they receive from NW Water."

The MP added: "Since privatisation, North West Water has increased the average bill by 75% - the second highest increase in the country. The average bill in 1989/90 was £111. This year it is £182."

more follows

Note to Editors: The July 18 letter to Sir Desmond Pitcher reads:

"I know you will share my concern at recent revelations about Conservative Members of Parliament taking money for tabling Parliamentary Questions. Fortunately, the practice has come to light and

the whole sordid issue is being referred to the Committee of Privileges. It beggars belief that this sort of thing has been going on under our very noses and I shall be pressing for this corrupt practice to be outlawed. Our constituents do not send us to Parliament for our palms to be greased by undisclosed private interests.

In the Commons debate last week, concerns were also raised about so-called Parliamentary Consultancies. Although the Register of Interests lists these, there is no indication of the value of these consultancies to the MP nor the nature of the consultancy itself. It has been suggested that this may amount to no more than booking House of Commons dining rooms and hosting the occasional dinner for corporate clients.

It is in this connection I write to you. I understand that Sir Malcolm Thornton MP is a Parliamentary Consultant to your company and I would be grateful if you could let me know what precisely this involves and what remuneration Sir Malcolm receives. In view of what has come to light recently, I think it is in the public interest for this information to be released."

240/94: For Immediate Release: 22 August 1994

PENDLE MP DEMANDS ACTION ON LORD ARCHER SHARE DEALING SCAM

Lord Archer, the former Tory MP, best selling novelist and, until recently, the front runner for Conservative Party chairman following the retirement of Sir Norman Fowler, should be investigated for insider share dealing says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Over the weekend facts have emerged concerning the share dealing in Anglia TV which says the Pendle MP make it "as plain as a pikestaff there is a case to answer". The deal netted an associate of Lord Archer a profit of £80,000. The MP has written to the President of the Board of Trade demanding the DTI investigation into the Archer case is reopened.

The MP said: "This Government and the people closely associated with it such as Lord Archer are up to their elbows in sleaze and half truths. Archer's brazenness takes my breath away."

Note to editors: The MP's letter to Michael Heseltine reads:
"Following the revelations in the weekend press and in today's FT about the share dealing activities of Lord Archer, I am writing to request you formally to re-open the DTI investigation into his conduct, to ascertain whether there are any grounds for bringing a prosecution against him for insider dealing.

Given that Lord Archer told the world that he did not buy any shares for himself, it beggars belief that he could have been so economical with the truth by withholding information that he had, in fact, bought fifty thousand shares for an associate, a Mr Broosk Saib. He allegedly instructed the stockbroker, Charles Stanley (a broker Lord Archer had never previously had any dealings with) to open an account on behalf of Mr Saib (an individual the broker had not previously had any dealings with) and arranged for the shares to be purchased. However, it seems he did not pay a penny for them at the time. He then arranged for the £80,000 profit on the deal to be sent to his London address. I see the cheque has now been cashed.

I have to say that my constituents are up in arms about these revelations. The fact that Lord Archer, who was within a hair's breadth of becoming chairman of the Conservative Party, should have acted with such subterfuge is quite simply breathtaking. An investigation into his conduct is clearly required."

241/94: For Immediate Release: 22 August 1994

BARROWFORD FLOOD VICTIMS IN BID TO MEET NW WATER CHIEF

The victims of last December's disastrous flood in Barrowford aim for a show down with North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher, who has just told the area's MP, Gordon Prentice, that the privatised water company's investment plans for the area will not be unveiled until Spring 1995.

The Barrowforders are up in arms over the delay and fear another flood would leave them destitute. Already insurance companies are withdrawing insurance cover from the flood prone houses and the area is being red lined with houses proving impossible to sell. What is needed is an early start by North West Water on work to update the ancient, crumbling sewage system and the flood prone Pendle Water which flows through the village.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "A thousand Barrowford people have signed a petition demanding action and they have my 1,000% support. I shall be meeting Sir Desmond Pitcher soon to discuss the Barrowford problem and other water issues affecting the area. I have asked Sir Desmond if he will receive the petition and listen to the legitimate complaints of the Barrowford people."

"Given the history of this whole affair, I confident he will wish to speak to them. I shall be with my constituents."

242/94: For Immediate Release: 25 August 1994

NEW SUNDAY TRADING LAW IN FORCE

The controversial Sunday Trading Act 1994 which allows all shops to open on Sundays comes into force on 26 August. Shops with a floor area smaller than 280 square metres will be able to trade at any time on a Sunday. Shops larger than this will be restricted to six hours between 10am and 6pm.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who backed the change in the law told a meeting of the GMB union in Nelson last night that it was against the law for employers to force their staff to work on a Sunday. "People need to be aware of the employment protection provisions of the new Act" said the MP.

Note to Editors: Shopworkers in England and Wales who are asked to do shop work on a Sunday (but who are not Sunday only workers) have the right •not to be dismissed or made redundant for refusing to work on Sundays and •not to suffer a detriment for refusing to work on Sundays. A "shopworker" includes not just sales assistants and check out operators but managers, supervisors, lift attendants, security staff, shelf fillers and trolley stackers.

All shopworkers who are in employment as shopworkers on 25 August 1994 become protected workers and will have these rights immediately. Even if they previously have agreed to a contract requiring Sunday work they can now refuse Sunday working. A protected worker can give up the right to refuse Sunday work by giving the employer a written "opting in notice" which expressly states that he/she does not object to Sunday working and that he/she wishes to work on Sunday and then entering into an express agreement with the employer to do shop work on Sundays or on a particular Sunday.

Shopworkers engaged from August 26 onwards are not "protected workers". These workers together with those who have "opted in" as above have the right to opt out of Sunday working. There is a three month period during which the employee will be obliged to continue Sunday working provided for in the contract if the employer wishes it. During this period the worker may not be dismissed or subjected to any other detriment for giving an "opting out" notice. After three months the employee has the right not to do Sunday shop work.

243/94: For Immediate Release: 24 August 1994

RAIL PRIVATISATION COSTS DWARF SIGNAL STAFFS CLAIM says PRENTICE

Railtrack are spending £16.5 million on fees for consultants on rail privatisation says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The 5.7% pay deal originally offered by Railtrack but vetoed by the Government would have cost £5m. The MP said: "This means that Railtrack are spending over three times the amount which would settle the rail dispute on management consultants, lawyers, bankers and so on. It is simply incredible."

Prentice continued: "Railtrack's £16m comes on top of £11m being spent by British Rail on consultants' fees and £20m being spent by the Government on consultants' fees."

"The total of £47m would settle the dispute many times over and still leave enough to turn our local rail network into a state-of-the-art railway. As it is, it is cash down the drain with nothing but misery to show for it."

244/94: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1994

RELIEF COMING ON STREAM FOR BARROWFORD FLOOD VICTIMS

The eight month campaign to save the people of Barrowford from the threat of future flooding could be on the verge of success. A letter to local MP, Gordon Prentice, from the Managing Director of North West Water, Derek Green, says construction on the project will start this financial year.

Families were flooded out in December last year and it was touch and go whether history would repeat itself in July when the area was drenched by torrential rain.

A delighted - but battle-hardened and sceptical - Mr Prentice said: "If North West Water stands behind this statement and acts on it, this will indeed have

been a victory for the village. It is good news indeed but I shall be pressing for an early start on the work when I meet the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, next month."

"The villagers deserve a medal for the way they have stuck with this and demanded action from this slow moving, high charging privatised utility. All credit goes to them."

ends

Note to Editors: Derek Green's letter to the MP reads: "Thank you for your letter of 17 August 1994 to which I am replying on behalf of the Chairman, about the flooding problems in Barrowford. I am sorry I gave you the impression that I would be unable to advise you of the outcome of our review as it affects Barrowford, until the formal publication of our overall investment plans in the Spring.

"We do recognise the severity and extent of the local problems and have been urgently examining how we might be able to accommodate a project for Barrowford in the context of the relative priorities of the various flooding problems in the region.

"I am pleased to tell you that it is our intention to start construction on a project this financial year, subject to land acquisition and gaining the necessary consents. The next step will be to conclude the hydraulic studies and project specification ready for the detailed design. *more follows*

Barrowford Flooding

"Since your previous letter a number of your constituents have written, prompted by the flooding in July. We will now be writing to them all to bring them up to date on the situation. I attach a copy of the letter we will be sending."

245/94: For Immediate Release: 12 September 1994

ALLERGY BOMBSHELL STUNS PRENTICE

The new NHS is failing patients in Pendle says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims local people are not being treated for severe medical problems because the area's health chiefs are unwilling to pay the price under the new contract driven purchaser/provider health service.

The MP said: "I have one case at the moment which is heart breaking. I have a constituent who cannot get in-patient treatment for a disabling allergy because she lives in Nelson and the allergy clinic is at Airedale which is in another NHS area. The whole thing is absolutely astonishing. I am visiting the clinic today to talk to the doctors about the case and its implications."

"I have also been in touch with the East Lancashire Health Authority - which under the new set up "purchases" health treatment from hospitals such as the Burnley General within its own area and from other hospitals further afield. But because they haven't entered into a contract to buy allergy services from the Airedale Allergy Centre, which is only a few miles down the road, my

constituent has to suffer in silence or pay to go private. There is no way she can afford the £3,000+ this would involve."

"Had my constituent lived in the area covered by the West Yorkshire Health Authority or the Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde Health Authority or South Lancashire - who are all prepared to pay for allergy treatments - she would have had free in-patient treatment at the Airedale Centre. I have written to the Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, about this case and I will not rest until my constituent receives proper medical treatment - free of charge."

Note to Editors: The identity of the constituent must remain confidential.

246/94: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1994

LOCAL COMPANY VANISHES "IN PUFF OF BLUE SMOKE"

An upholstery firm based in Nelson which employed seven local people has disappeared like a prop from a Paul Daniel's Magic Show according to local MP and amateur sleuth, Gordon Prentice.

The firm "Birchcraft" was based at Marsden Mill, Brunswick Street, Nelson until a couple of weeks ago when it vanished into the ether over the space of a weekend.

The MP commented: "The four men and three women employed by this company to do sewing and upholstery work were told to stay away from work on the days either side of a weekend and, when they turned up to clock in, they couldn't believe their eyes. Their workplace had been stripped bare and the owner of the company had *"done a runner"* with his employees' wages, holiday pay and the rest. It is an astonishing tale."

"I am determined to track down these vanishing entrepreneurs and recover the cash they owe my constituents. I am in touch with the Employment Department and others to see if we can get to them before the trail turns cold."

Note to Editors: Helen Jeffrey of 24 Cliff Street, Colne is one of the ex employees owed money by Birchcraft. She is willing to talk to the Press.

247/94: For Immediate Release: 31 August 1994

ROW GROWS OVER OLD FOLKS' TV LICENCES

248/94: For Immediate Release: September 1994

LORD ARCHER

250/94: For Immediate Release: 14 September 1994

PRENTICE LISTENS TO CHILD
SUPPORT CRITICS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, told a meeting in Nelson tonight (Wednesday) of Pendle's most vociferous critics of the controversial Child Support Act that a review was under way which could bring major changes. He said the Child Support Act had to be changed fundamentally or it risked losing public confidence.

The organisation *Pendle Against the Child Support Act* told the MP it wanted to see the Act scrapped. The MP said the House of Commons Social Security Committee was currently reviewing the operation of the Child Support Act and its report with recommendations was expected shortly. "Many respected organisations, including the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which has no axe to grind, have called for fundamental changes to this Act which is causing so much misery and heartache. I agree."

The MP - who received a rough ride at an anti-CSA rally in Burnley earlier this year when an angry crowd demanded the immediate scrapping of the legislation - said: "There is no dispute with the principle that parents should contribute to the maintenance of their children. The argument is all about how this should best be done."

"Clearly, the present system is deeply flawed. For example, clean break settlements are disregarded completely so even if one partner hands over everything on divorce - the house, car and all - he (or less usually she) can still be called on to pay maintenance regardless of the agreement made between the two parties earlier. There is also no proper appeal system against the CSA's assessments and this leads to grave injustices."

251/94: For Immediate Release: 13 September 1994

MP TO LEAD TRESPASS OVER PENDLE'S "NO GO" AREAS

Pendle's "no go areas" which are out of bounds to the general public are to feel the tramp of feet on Sunday 23 October. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be leading a peaceful mass trespass over some of Pendle's uncultivated moorland where the public is denied right of access.

The MP commented: "This is a burning issue for many people. Uncultivated moorland - which isn't home to rare plants or flowers or animals or birds that need protection - should be regarded as open country. The public should be able to wander freely."

"I shall be doing this ramble at a time when Parliament is considering the Lords amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill - a measure that is causing the most profound disquiet."

"The proposed new offence of "aggravated trespass" might make peaceful protest illegal. When the Home Secretary announced the legislation he said it was aimed at those who disrupt country sports and he talked of not allowing "threatening behaviour" to go unchecked."

"I certainly do not condone violent or threatening behaviour (and neither, incidently, does the Hunt Saboteurs Association) but the new offence is drawn much wider. It will be an offence to do anything which is intended to have the

effect of obstructing or disrupting any lawful activity. Walking across a field could be enough!"

252/94: For Immediate Release: 13 September 1994

PENDLE MP TACKLES LORD ARCHER OVER INSIDER DEALING REPORT

News this week that the millionaire novelist and former Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, Lord Archer, is to be absent from the Party's annual conference because he will be "too busy" with his duties as a working Conservative peer in the Lords have been greeted with incredulity by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Lord Archer has been at the centre of a row involving the purchase and sale of shares in Anglia Television just prior to a successful takeover bid by MAI. The move, which netted a profit of £80,000 for an associate of Lord Archer, prompted allegations that the peer had been involved in insider dealing - a criminal offence carrying a maximum jail sentence of seven years.

The Pendle MP said: "I have already been in touch with Michael Heseltine formally to ask him to publish the report of the DTI inspectors which, in the words of Lord Archer, "exonerates" the peer. Clearly, we can only test the accuracy of this by having sight of the document. Since Government Ministers are unwilling to make a copy available, I am writing to Lord Archer - a fellow Parliamentarian, albeit unelected - to press him to release it."

"The new Chairman of the Tory Party, Jeremy Hanley, told the Financial Times that *"Jeffrey will find it is probably better to speak out rather than not."* This is sound advice and I for one will not be letting the matter drop until we get access to all the facts."

"Personally, I am disappointed we won't be seeing Lord Archer at this year's Tory Party Conference. He is usually fighting to get to the rostrum in the law and order debate. We will just have to make do with the memory of his contribution last year when he called on the Home Secretary to "stand and deliver!"

"Insider dealing is not a trivial issue. Being rich and famous and a Conservative peer is no defence. This one is going to run and run."

253/94: For Immediate Release: 13 September 1994

PENDLE'S "PINTA" UNDER THREAT

Government policies to deregulate the milk industry from November mean prices are set to rise according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says jobs and doorstep deliveries of the "pinta" are threatened.

Prentice said: "For years the people of Pendle have been happy with their milk supply whether they get it delivered to the door or buy it from a shop. British people drink the most milk in Europe and the British industry produces the best quality milk."

"Now Government plans could change all that. They have decided that from November they will abolish the Milk Marketing Boards which have run the milk industry in Britain since the 1930s. They want to replace them with a private monopoly body run by milk producers. Even some Conservatives admit this could cause prices to rise and lead to uncompetitive practices but they are pressing ahead anyway."

"Half a generation ago, the last Labour Government saved the daily delivery of the pinta from being abolished by ludicrous European regulations. Now our very own Government is creating the conditions which could lead to the end of the pinta as we know it" the MP lamented.

Note to Editors: The foundation of Britain's large and efficient milk industry has been the Milk Marketing Boards - statutory bodies set up in the 1930s. Separate Boards cover England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Boards have monopoly powers to buy all milk from dairy farmers in their areas.

The Milk marketing Boards have served the industry well and have had the support of milk producers and the dairy trade. prices have been set at ba level which strikes a balance between the interests of consumers and producers. In addition to collecting milk from the farms, including in remote areas, the Boards have developed processing arms (Dairy Crest in England) which produce the highest quality milk in Europe.

UK milk consumption at 200 pints per person per year is the highest in the European Union. The output of liquid milk was valued at £3.2 billion in 1993. 33,000 farmers, 16,500 workers in manufacturing and processing and 46,000 jobs in the retail sector are supported by the milk industry.

Pendle's Pinta under threat

The European Dimension. In the 1970s the European Commission and a number of European Governments challenged the monopoly role of the Milk Marketing Boards through the Treaty of Rome. The then Labour Government took a determined stand in defence of the Boards and in 1978 secured amendments to EC regulations which ratified the role of the Boards.

In the 1980s an argument developed over whether the fast growing low fat milks market was covered by the Boards. Instead of trying to resolve the problem, the Government used it as an excuse to propose the abolition of the Boards. In fact, the European Court ruled that low fat milks were covered by the scheme. The British Government still likes to give the impression that European decisions have required the abolition of the Boards. This si not true. The decision to abolish is based on Conservative dogma.

The Agriculture Act 1993 provides for the abolition of the Boards. Labour opposed this Act and argued that if the Government were determined to abolish the current arrangements they should bring forward a replacement themselves. Instead, they left this to the Milk Marketing Boards themselves. In England and Wales, Milk Marque, a voluntary farmers' co-operative will become the dominant buyer of milk from the farmers. The processing arms of the existing Boards are to be sold off.

Gillian Shepherd, the then Agriculture Minister, admitted there was a possibility of Milk marque "abusing its market power in a discriminatory or otherwise unfair manner" and claimed the Office of Fair Trading and the European Commission should keep an eye on them. This was an admission that things could go badly wrong. This is already happening.

254/94: For Immediate Release: 13 September 1994

FURY OVER HOUSING BENEFIT CUT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has attacked Government plans to cut Housing Benefit. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Jonathan Aitken MP - who lives in a 16 room house - caused a storm over the weekend when he suggested people on HB were living in houses that were too large for them and the cost to the nation of housing benefit had to be curtailed.

The Pendle MP said: "The cost of Housing Benefit has shot up since the Government deregulated private rents in 1989. The total spent on Housing Benefit - which pays the rents charged by landlords - has soared four-fold since 1989. Rents have gone through the roof and people who can't afford to pay them have had to turn to Housing Benefit. The Government has allowed market rents to rip and now wants to cap HB."

"But it's not private tenants who make a killing from Housing Benefit - it's the private landlords who pocket the money. Private landlords are being subsidised at the expense of the tax-payer."

"The Government must halt soaring rent increases that result from deregulation and allow councils such as Pendle to build new homes for people to rent. That would help tax-payers, tenants, building workers and the construction industry" said the MP.

"It has been years since Pendle Council has been allowed to build the new homes that we so desperately need. Yet, there are 1,638 households waiting to be rehoused. This is about 6% of the total number of households in the Borough.

The MP added: "Much of our housing stock is completely clapped out. 20,000 houses are pre-1919. This is an astonishing 57% of the total. 18,000 were build before the turn of the century and 14,950 are in need of renovation. The Government's housing policies have been an unmitigated disaster for Pendle."

more follows

Housing Crisis

Note to Editors: Here in Pendle, 8.1% of our 33,967 households are privately rented or rented from a housing association. 12.7% are rented from the Council and 79.1% are owner occupied - either owned outright or buying. (Source 1991 census)

The Government wants to cut taxes before the next election and they are looking to cut public spending. One target is the burgeoning Housing Benefit bill. However, the bill has shot up because the Government has failed to

manage the economy. More people are unemployed and are therefore unable to pay their rent. More people are on low pay and need help and more people are stuck in the poverty trap where, partly because Housing Benefit is withdrawn so rapidly, claimants can lose up to 97p for each extra £1 earned.

In May 1992 there were 4.5 million claimants of HB of whom

- 3.3 million were local authority tenants receiving £26.45p on average.
- 340,000 were Housing Association tenants receiving £32.24p on average
- 950,000 were private tenants receiving £40.69p on average.

The overall Housing Benefit bill has grown from £3.75 billion in 1988/89 to an estimated out-turn for 1993/4 of £8.5 billion. It is expected to grow to nearly £11 billion in 1995/6.

The bill for local authority and Housing Association tenants has grown from just over £1 billion in 1988/9 to £3.8 billion in 1993/4 and to a projected £4.9 billion in 1995/6.

255/94: For Immediate Release: 14 September 1994

DISABILITY RIGHTS BILL NEEDED NOW

Disabled people are discriminated against in employment and should be given the rights that the rest of us take for granted says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

During yesterday's annual meeting of the East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council, ELTEC, at the Burnley Mechanics, the MP quizzed former mandarin, Sir Geoffrey Holland, until recently Permanent Secretary at the Department of Employment and at the centre of policy making for two decades.

Prentice said: "Sir Geoffrey's interesting speech was panoramic in scope, cataloguing all the changes in employment law and policy since 1979 which, he claimed, had transformed the training and education landscape. But when I asked him if we needed a Disability Rights Bill - and if not, why not - he confessed he didn't know. He batted the ball back and said it was a matter for the House of Commons! I found his reply - from a vastly experienced top civil servant but now retired and free to speak his mind - disappointing and, if I'm honest, inadequate."

Speaking after the meeting, the MP said 14% of people had some kind of disability and their needs were not being addressed. "Under the 1944 Disabled Persons Employment Act there is a quota of 3% of jobs which firms should allocate for people with disabilities. In the private sector the actual percentage is 0.7% and in the public sector 0.8%. It is not just about numbers but about the nature and type of work available. Disabled people can be put into job ghettos - the blind telephonist is the classic example."

"Disability crosses race, age, gender and class. It can strike any one of us at any time - from the moment of birth onwards. Disabled people are speaking

up for themselves and are demanding fair treatment. I support them" said the MP.

257/94: For Immediate Release: 14 September 1994

NORTH WEST "INTO RECESSION FIRST AND OUT LAST" says PENDLE MP

Today's nationwide fall in unemployment is not mirrored in Pendle where unemployment for August is stuck at the July figure of 7.5%. The number of people out of work and claiming benefit stood at 2,816 - two (2) up on the July figure. This is the third monthly increase in a row.

Of the 2,816 jobless total, 2,125 are men and 691 are women. Almost one in ten men is out of work in Pendle. Vacancies at the Nelson Job Centre are down substantially (194 in July to 117 in August) and at Colne they are unchanged (107 to 108).

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The figures are disappointing as I was hoping for a drop in unemployment here especially as we are all told by the Chancellor that the economy is now growing fast."

"Unfortunately, he has slammed on the brakes by putting up interest rates at a time when the recovery is barely perceptible in Pendle. Here in the North West, we are into recession first and out of recession last."

258/94: For Immediate Release: 19 September 1994

MP DEMANDS INQUIRY INTO SACKING

The summary dismissal of Mr Ian Mahady, the consultant gynaecologist at Burnley General warrants an immediate inquiry conducted by an independent third party able to assess objectively the facts of this extraordinary sacking, says Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

News of the sacking hit the national press last week when Mr Mahady was ordered out of the hospital. The doctor was given three hours to clear his desk and get out by the NHS Trust's Deputy Chief Executive, David Meakin.

Press reports quote Mr Meakin justifying the sacking by saying: *"The number of patients that have been treated in the gynaecology and obstetrics department has not increased since we (employed) an extra consultant."* If that is the case then the people responsible are those who forecast demand for medical services and do the planning - not those who do the treating.

"The whole business is crying out to be investigated. Why was this consultant singled out for sacking in the first place? Why only three hours notice? Why - as the press reports suggest - did the Trust's Board of Directors decide that those made redundant should leave the hospital immediately and not work out their notice?"

"However, the most fundamental question in this. Why is this sort of thing happening in our health service?"

"I have written to the Trust's £80,000+ a year Chief Executive, Maggie Aikman, asking for a full report on the circumstances surrounding this dismissal."

259/94: For Immediate Release: 19 September 1994

"ELECTRICITY RIP-OFF" says MP

A supercharged meeting is promised today between Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and Yorkshire Electricity bosses. Over recent years, sparks have flown after angry clashes between the two over soaring electricity bills, directors pay and perks hikes and controversial policies such as the closure of the YE showroom in Church Street in Barnoldswick. The Sheffield MP and campaigner for consumer rights, Helen Jackson, will also be there.

Last month, the Pendle MP slammed the review of electricity prices produced by Professor Stephen Littlechild, the Electricity Regulator. The MP said the so-called price cuts were an illusion. Prentice claimed the percentage cut of 14% was only being imposed on one third of the household electricity bill. The other two thirds was not touched while the whole of the bill would still carry VAT of 9.5% on 1 April 1995 on top of this year's 8%. He said: "The typical bill for a Yorkshire Electricity consumer this year is £278.78. It will rise to £313.89 in April next year - an increase of £35.11p."

"We need to watch the privatised electricity companies like hawks. As soon as a plug touches a socket the cash registers start ringing."

Background Note to Editors: What follows comes from the report of the National Audit Office (1992) on the sale of the twelve regional electricity companies.

Before 31 March 1990, most of the generation and almost all the public supply and distribution of electricity were in national ownership. The generation and transmission of electricity were carried out by the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB). The CEGB owned and operated the national grid (the high voltage transmission system), all the nuclear power stations and most other power plants in England and Wales.

Distribution was the responsibility of twelve area electricity boards. These took electricity from the national grid and sold it to domestic and business consumers, mostly on the basis of published tariffs. Some very large customers had special agreements or contracts with the area boards or directly with the CEGB.

more follows

The Electricity Council exercised a co-ordinating role on matters of industry wide concern. The Council included the chairs of the twelve area boards and representatives of the CEGB. The Council also had specific responsibilities including offering advice to the Government on behalf of the industry as a whole.

Privatising Electricity. In February 1988, the Government published a White paper setting out their proposals for privatising the electricity industry

in England and Wales. The White Paper proposed that the CEGB should be divided into three parts: the national grid would be owned jointly by the twelve regional electricity companies; and the power stations would be split between two companies, National Power, which would take 70% of the generating capacity, including all nuclear power stations, and PowerGen, which would take the remaining 30%. there would be competition in power generation between these companies and existing alternative sources, such as those in Scotland and France, along with new entrants to the generation market.

The monopoly power of the twelve regional electricity companies was to be curtailed: large customers would be able to enter into direct contracts with generators, with new entrants to the generation market or with regional electricity companies other than their local company. Customer interests were to be protected by regulation. The Electricity Council was to be abolished.

To secure the place of nuclear generation in the market, each regional electricity company would be required to obtain a proportion of its power supplies from non fossil (mainly nuclear) sources. A fossil fuel levy was subsequently introduced to compensate the companies for the additional cost of nuclear power. The levy is ultimately borne by the consumer. The Government announced in July 1989 that the Magnox nuclear power stations (the first generation of reactors) would be withdrawn from the sale on the grounds that they were drawing to the end of their useful lives, and that it would not be appropriate to burden the private sector with the significant cost of their operation and closure. In November 1989, the Government decided that the remaining nuclear power stations should stay in public ownership, on the grounds that unacceptable financial guarantees were being sought by the markets.

The Electricity Act 1989 provided the legislative basis for giving effect to these proposals. The twelve regional electricity companies distribute electricity and supply it to their customers. because of their existing distribution systems, the companies have the effective monopoly of distribution in their areas. Distribution provides the bulk of their operating profits. the companies also continue the subsidiary activities of retailing electrical appliances and electrical contracting work, as well as some electricity generation. they also receive dividends from their jointly owned subsidiary, the National Grid Company.

At present each company has the monopoly of electricity supply to smaller consumers in their area, defined as those demanding a load of up to 1,000 kilowatts of electricity, but not to larger consumers. From this year (1994) the monopoly will apply to loads of up to 100 kilowatts. This will still cover all domestic consumers. In 1998 the remaining monopoly powers of supply are due to be abolished.

Electrical storm

Regulation. The Office of Electricity regulation (OFFER) was set up in 1989. Its tasks are to ensure that power supplies are secure, to promote competition, top protect the interests of consumers and ensure the adherence to the terms and conditions of the licences under which electricity is generated, transmitted, distributed and sold to consumers.

260/94: For Immediate Release: 20 September 1994

TEN MORE TORY TAXES SAYS PRENTICE

People in Pendle face ten new Tory taxes says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "After he put up interest rates last week, Kenneth Clarke admitted there would be no tax cuts in this November's budget. But that's only half the story - there are ten tax increases on the way. That's because the last two budgets introduced delayed tax increases and now the chickens are coming home to roost."

"From October, people will have to pay tax on home insurance and car insurance. Then in November the tax on holidays comes in - £5 on European flights and £10 for the rest of the world. These will be coupled with a 5% increase in real terms in duty on petrol and 3% on tobacco."

"Next April VAT on fuel will double and income tax will go up for married couples and people with mortgages. The married couple's allowance is reduced to 15% and mortgage income tax relief is cut to 15%. VAT on fuel goes up from 8% to 17.5%. Next November there will be more increases in fuel and tobacco duty."

"Even before these increases the average family was paying £500 more per year than in 1979 thanks to previous Conservative tax increases. Now they face an even bigger bill."

"That fact is people in Pendle can no longer afford the Conservatives" said the MP. "No-one will ever again believe a word they say on tax."

261/94: For Immediate Release: 20 September 1994

PENDLE MP DUBS LIB DEM POLICIES
A "WITCHES BREW"

The new policies of the Liberal Democrats, unveiled at their Conference this week, have been dubbed "a witches brew" by local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says a more potent mixture could hardly have been concocted to make people think twice about what the Liberal Democrats stand for.

The MP, who was speaking at a meeting in Colne tonight of the trade union, Unison, said: "The Liberal Democrats are offering the British public a heady prescription. First, there is the policy of contraceptives for 11 year old girls. Then comes the policy to legalise cannabis. On Sunday, Paddy Ashdown was promising a top rate of tax of 60p but this had changed by Monday to 50p. On Monday there was to be no minimum wage. On Tuesday there is to be one. However, the monarchy is not to be abolished by the Liberal Democrats despite rumours to the contrary."

"I'll put my money where my mouth is on this one. I shall donate £100 to a charity of their choice if the local Liberal Democrats publicise prominently in their local Focus leaflets this arresting mixture of policies."

The MP added: "No-one takes them seriously because no-one seriously believes they are ever going to be in a position to turn these policies into the law of the land."

262/94: For Immediate Release: 20 September 1994

DEATH GAMBLE TRIP TO PAKISTAN

The brother of Mohammed Afzal, the Nelson driving instructor who was slain in a brutal murder in Jurauh Village, Pakistan on 4 October 1992, has been told by Foreign Office Minister, Tony Baldry, that the British Government cannot guarantee his safety if he returns to Pakistan as the key witness in the trial of his brother's assassin. Zafar Iqbal was with Mr Afzal but survived the murderous attack.

After two years on the run, the Pakistani police now have the alleged killer in custody and the eye witness identification by Mr Afzal's brother, Zafar Iqbal, is crucial to the prosecution's case.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice said: "I sought assurances from our own Government that Mr Iqbal would be given full protection and his safety guaranteed by the Pakistani authorities if he were to return to Pakistan for the trial. I asked the Foreign Office minister to contact his opposite number in Pakistan but, so far, the Pakistani authorities have not got back to us."

"In the circumstances I cannot, with a clear conscience, advise Zafar Iqbal to return to Pakistan. I fear for his safety and in the absence of a clear, categorical assurance from the Pakistani police that they will shadow him, day and night, until the trial is over, I cannot advise him to go back. Apart from the one alleged killer who is in custody, the rest of the murderous band is still out there, on the loose. I shall continue to press for a cast iron guarantee that Mr Iqbal will be safe from attack if he returns - as he clearly wishes to do - to help put his brother's killers behind bars."

Note 1 to Editors: The letter from Tony Baldry MP to the Pendle MP reads:

"Our High Commission in Islamabad have continued to approach the Pakistani authorities and have also been in contact with the police in Kharian. However, to date (14 September), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have not replied to the High Commission. They have therefore been unable to obtain any further information about this dreadful matter.

more follows

Unfortunately it is impossible for the High Commission to guarantee the safety of Mr Iqbal should he return to Pakistan. This is solely the responsibility of the local authorities. Mr Iqbal could ask the Pakistani police to provide protection but it is impossible to say whether this would be granted or how effective any protection may be.

It is for Mr Iqbal to decide whether he wishes to return to Pakistan. Should he decide to travel he may wish to pass details of his itinerary to our consular department who will in turn make the High Commission aware of Mr Iqbal's

plans. However, as we understand that Mr Iqbal also has Pakistani nationality, the High Commission's ability to assist him will be very limited."

Note 2 to Editors: In July of last year, the names of the alleged killers of Nelson driving instructor, Mohammed Afzal, were released by the Kharian Police in Pakistan after a nine month battle by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to force them to act.

On 14 October 1992, Prentice passed the names of the alleged killers on to Mark Lennox Boyd, the Minister then responsible at the Foreign Office. On 26 October, Prentice told the Press that the alleged murderers of Mohammed Afzal, were being sheltered by the top council chief in his home town in Pakistan. Afzal was shot dead in a hail of bullets on 4 October in Jaurah Village and his brother, Zafar Iqbal, defied death despite being shot twice at point blank range. Zafar Iqbal returned to the UK and recovered from the ordeal. Zafar Iqbal was blasted from a distance of two feet and lost four pints of blood in his attempt to escape from his attackers.

In November 1992, Prentice asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps had been take to help the Pakistani authorities to apprehend the killers of Mohammed Afzal. The then Minister (Mark Lennox Boyd MP) told the MP: "Mr Afzal was a dual British-Pakistani national, and the United Kingdom has no standing under international law to intervene in the investigation of his murder, which is being conducted by the Pakistani police. Our High Commission in Islamabad is, however, maintaining contact with the Pakistani authorities."

In June 1993, the Pendle MP asked the President of Pakistan to intervene personally to help track down the killers. The MP told the President that eight months of steady and insistent pressure by him had produced no concrete results.

263/94: For Immediate Release: 21 September 1994

MP TO VISIT KOREA

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to visit one of the Far East's "tiger economies" next week when he flies off to Korea for a major international conference in the capital, Seoul, on international relations and global development. The MP, who has a special interest in manufacturing, will be talking to the chiefs of some of Korea's major industries.

Prentice said: "People think that Korea is just another country, over there in the Far East, yet the income of the average Korean could overtake the average Briton by the turn of the century. It is a sobering thought. People here are buying Korean cars and microwaves and electric equipment of all kinds."

"I shall be meeting leading Korean politicians and industrialists and I am keen to find how they see East Asia developing over the next decade and what opportunities there may be for firms in the Pendle area - and in Lancashire - to pick up business."

The MP added: "The Korean economy is growing incredibly fast. We need to forge business links with these dynamic economies in the Far East."

Note to Editors: The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) writes: During the past three decades, Korea has achieved a remarkable economic record. At the end of the Korean War, per capita income was only 1% of that in the OECD area (the most developed countries). By 1992, income per capita had risen to one third of the OECD average and was on a par with Greece and Portugal. The economy had become larger than all but nine OECD countries in 1992 and eight in 1993. Korea was the thirteenth largest exporter in the world.

264/94: For Immediate Release: 21 September 1994

SITUATIONS VACANT ON NHS BOARDS

The Chairman of the North Western Regional Health Authority, Sir Donald Wilson, has invited local MP, Gordon Prentice, to submit names of people interested in serving at the highest level on NHS boards as non-executive directors. The MP has told Sir Donald he is putting together a list of suitable appointees who will stand up for the public interest in the new market driven health service.

The MP said: "You could have knocked me over with a feather when I received this letter from Sir Donald. I have never been invited to submit names before. People have traditionally appeared on NHS boards as if by magic. They simply materialise."

"Curiously, just before I received Sir Donald's letter I had, in fact, been reading about him in the Sunday Observer (11 September). He is also President of the Chester Conservative Association and is one of a host of top Tories who sit in judgement over what is happening to our NHS. It is perfectly clear that NHS Boards are stuffed full of Tories. The Health Service is a Job Centre for the Conservatives."

The MP continued: "I shall be submitting names but as a short term measure only. An incoming Labour Government will sweep away all the seedy patronage and bring accountability back into the NHS. It will be a breath of fresh air to have people at the top of the NHS who listen to local people."

266/94: For Immediate Release: 18 October 1994

PENDLE MP SLAMS "SLAVE WAGES"

The Burnley employer who confessed surprise to the local press that no-one was prepared to work for him despite the offer of £80 a weekly wage packet was named in the Commons today by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP told Employment Minister, Phillip Oppenheim, that the UK was the only country in the European Union not to have some legal pay protection for the poorest.

Prentice asked what advice the Minister would give to people in North East Lancashire "who see sweat shop rates of pay being replaced by slave labour rates of pay such as the £80 a week offered by Joe McBride of Northern

Textiles in Burnley". The MP asked: "Should people be grateful for these grotesque wage rates?"

Oppenheim refused to condemn the Burnley employer. The Pendle MP said afterwards: "These wage rates are positively Dickensian. The sooner we get minimum wage legislation the better."

Note to Editors: The following information is from the Low Pay Unit: Low pay affects between a quarter and a third of the adult workforce. In terms of scale alone, it is a problem that deserves urgent action. At present nearly ten million employees in Great Britain earn poverty wages, nearly five million of these are working full-time and over four million part-time: three and a half million of the part-timers are women.

Even in comparison with the 2.6 million registered claimants unemployed, with which low pay is often associated, its proportions are immense. Full employment is a priority for the Labour Party. However, employment must not only be a question of *quantity* but also one of *quality*

Low pay and unemployment are inseparable problems; their cause and effects and often their victims are similar. The low paid form a section of the labour market who are disadvantaged and face the joint evils of long term insecurity and hardship.

What is Low Pay? Definitions of low pay differ depending on whom you are talking to. Is it pay that is considered too low for the type of work done, or should it be related to the pay of others. Should it be calculated by some

formula linked to national earnings, or should we link low pay to some concept relating to the provision of an adequate standard of living, and if so should it be connected to the needs of the wage earner, or to their family commitment's. *All of these are questions that must be addressed.*

The Council of Europe define low pay as a figure equivalent to 68 per cent of the average wage for full-time male and females in each Member State, and this is known as the 'decency threshold'. Under the Council of Europe's Social Charter (to be distinguished from the European Union's social charter), signatory governments are required to ensure that workers receive a wage which provides *fair remuneration* ' In the UK, in 1993, this figure was £215.50 a week or £5.75 an hour.

This is the level at which most European countries have set their minimum wage levels, with the exception of Ireland and Germany, where minimum rates range from 40 to 60 per cent of the average wage, depending on the sector.

The Low Pay Unit's definition is based on a figure equivalent to 66 per cent of median male earnings, giving a figure of £203.07. This is close to the Council of Europe figure, but uses the median (mid-point) wage, instead of the simple average. This is because the average itself would move as the earnings of the lowest paid improved, creating an ever-moving target if this were used as the reference point for setting a minimum wage.

The work of Professor Peter Townsend confirms that a minimum wage set at this level could do much to overcome the multiple deprivation that many families face. Townsend found that earnings of around two thirds of the male mid point, coincided closely with the level of income needed to avoid social and employment deprivation (P.Townsend, Poverty in the UK, Penguin, 1979).

The Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, set up in the mid 1970s, defined low pay as *'the point below which one tenth of all workers fall,* the lowest 10 per cent. Because the position ofthe poorest workers has deteriorated so much in recent years, this definition would produce a figure of£160.90 a week in 1993 .

All the above definitions define low pay as a relative problem. Ministers often argue that criteria of subsistence are more appropriate than relative definitions, because they provide a measure of poverty rather than inequality.

If we relate low pay to an official definition of subsistence, we can compare the earnings of the low paid to the income they would receive when claiming Family Credit. According to the Department of Social Security the average weekly earnings of Family Credit recipients were just under £104.00 in January 1994 (DSS Press Release, 29 July 1994). **However, many of these would be working part-time, so that this does not provide us with a comparable definition of low pay.** Nevertheless, at present there are over half a million individuals claiming family credit that is used to supplement poverty pay, and the Treasury projects that the revenue needed to finance Family Credit will double every 2 to 3 years.

Table 1: Level of Low Pay and the number of Employees it effects.

Definition	£ per week	Number of employees who would be considered low paid by definition
Family Credit	£104.00	521,320
Royal Commission	£160.90	3,922,589
Low Pay Unit	£203.07	8,927,792
Council of Europe	£215.50	9,801,315

267/94: For Immediate Release: 19 October 1994

"SELL-OFF MANIA" SLAMMED BY PENDLE MP

People in Pendle are sick to death of the Conservatives' never-ending privatisation says local MP Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "The Government should give top priority to tackling crime and creating jobs. Instead, they are absolutely obsessed with privatisation. People here in Pendle are sick to death of the Tories' never-ending privatisation plans.

"They've only just started privatising the railways but the system is already in a mess. £700 million of taxpayers' money is being squandered on

privatisation. It could be invested in new trains. No wonder everybody is against rail privatisation."

"The Government say they want to privatise the Post Office. Everyone is against it. I've had 7,000 local people sign petitions against it. I've never had a bigger post-bag. Everybody knows local services will suffer while the people in the boardroom grab more and more in pay and perks."

"Although they won't admit it, everybody knows the Tories also want to privatise the National Health Service. The very idea really scares all thinking people. A two tier health service is already developing."

The MP added: "This means nothing but trouble for local people. Privatisation is just another way the Tories look after their rich friends".

Note to Editors: Privatisation always shortchanges the taxpayer and leads to job losses for the workforce. It usually also reduces services and raises prices. The only real winners are the consultants and advisers who get huge fees and the boardroom bosses who award themselves huge pay rises and perks.

The Tories are obsessed with privatisation at all costs. They are determined to continue their madcap policy of privatising everything. That is why

they persist with plans to privatise British Rail and the Post Office. That is why they would like to privatise the National Health Service if they could get away with it.

Labour is opposed to their plans for more privatisation. As Tony Blair said to the recent Blackpool Conference -

"Education is just one of the public services we provide together to improve the quality of opportunity for each of us. It cannot be left to the market.

"Nor can our health service. Or our armed forces. Or our police. Neither should the railways or the Post Office. They should be run for the public and they should stay in public ownership for the people of this country."

RIPPING OFF THE TAXPAYER:

Every time the Tories privatise an industry, they deliberately sell it for less than its value. The taxpayer is shortchanged every time. Appendix A shows the share price at which the Tories sold each privatised industry compared with its share price at the end of the first day's trading on the stock market. This shows that Tory privatisation has shortchanged taxpayers to the tune of over £5.3 billion.

In the water industry since privatisation, consumers' bills have risen by 68 per cent. In the electricity industry, under the Tories' current proposals for domestic electricity prices and VAT, bills will have risen by over 36 per cent between 1993 and April 1995.

JOB LOSSES:

Privatisation has added to the dole queues. The privatised utilities are expected to have shed nearly 250,000 jobs by the end of the century. This in itself is bad for the economy, because the cost to the taxpayer in benefits paid out and taxes not received is £9,000 a year for each unemployed worker.

In the first four years of the privatised water industry, employment fell in the 10 privatised companies from 40,885 in 1989 to 38,417 in 1993. Since that date, Anglia Water has made a further 900 white collar workers redundant. Yorkshire Water has also made a further 400 workers redundant.

In the electricity industry, 10,000 jobs were lost in the first three years following privatisation. Since then, the workforce in the electricity companies has shrunk by a further 10 per cent.

BOSSES' PAY INCREASES AND NEW PERKS:

The bosses of the privatised industries do well. They have awarded themselves huge pay increases and other lucrative perks such as share option schemes.

Under a share option scheme, directors can buy shares in their companies at a slight discount on the present market price in, say, three to five years'

time. If the company's share price has fallen the director can let the options lapse and is not out of pocket. But if in the meantime the share price has risen, the director can sell the shares straight away and pocket a handsome profit.

Examples of pay and perks include -

* The Chairman of North West Water received a salary of £338,000 in 1993/94 - a more than six-fold increase since privatisation.

The Chairman of every privatised water company more than doubled his salary - many of their salaries have more than tripled.

The Chairman of British Gas made a personal profit of £361, 992 last year from a share option scheme. This was on top of his salary of £386,246.

The Chairman of Eastern Electricity took up options on 121,107 shares and transferred the ma jority of them to his wife. They then sold the lot for a £446,867 profit, on top of his own £242,000 annual salary. Executive Share Options for the privatised utilities are worth £350 million.

FIELD DAY FOR CONSULTANTS AND ADVISERS:

The other winners from privatisation are the hordes of consultants, PR merchants, merchant bankers and other advisers to whom the Tory Government has handed over millions of pounds for advice on privatisation. None of this money has been put to any good use. It has all been squandered.

Rail privatisation is costing the taxpayer around £700 million.

The Government spent over £230 million solely on the administrative costs of the share offers for electricity privatisation.

The Government has spent over £150 million advertising privatisations.

The Tory obsession with privatisation means -

* They are persisting with plans for rail privatisation, despite the fact that virtually nobody believes it can possibly work.

They are pressing ahead with plans to privatise the Post Office despite the fact that 68 per cent of the public (56 per cent of Tory voters) want it to remain a public service.

* Despite public opposition and repeated denials that they are privatising the NHS, they have been forced to admit to holding talks with American private health corporations. The former NHS Deputy Head, Peter Griffiths, has made clear that the Tories aim to transfer NHS trusts to the private sector.

268/94: For Immediate Release: 19 October 1994

PENDLE MP BLASTS GOVERNMENT "STEEPED IN SLEAZE"

The government is up to its elbows in sleaze says local MP, Gordon Prentice. His call for a new code of ethics in Government came after the Prime Minister stonewalled on Opposition demands for the DTI report on the Lord Archer "insider dealing scam" to be published.

The MP said: "Insider dealing is a serious criminal offence carrying an unlimited fine and jail for up to seven years. I wrote to Lord Archer in early September asking him to agree publication of the DTI Inspectors' report which the peer claimed "exonerated him". So far, I have not had the courtesy of a reply and I doubt that I shall get one."

"Over the summer, I also wrote to the Conservative MP for Crosby, Sir Malcolm Thornton, who describes himself as a Parliamentary Consultant to North West Water, the company that supplies water to most of my constituency. I asked him what this consultancy involved and how much he got paid. I put the same question to Sir Desmond Pitcher, the Chairman of North West Water, and in both cases got a polite but bland reply which did not give the information I asked for. My constituents who pay sky high water bills have a right to know what advice, expertise and specialisms Sir Malcolm uniquely offers - and how much he gets paid."

"All this comes on top of the Parliamentary Questions for cash affair which, as far as I am concerned, is a clear case of corruption and not the error of judgement claimed by the Conservative Colne Valley MP, Graham Riddick."

The MP also launched a searing attack on quangoes which he claimed were a job centre for defeated Tory MPs and MEPs. "My predecessor, John Lee, ended up as Chairman of Christie NHS Trust in Manchester and the recently defeated MEP for Lancashire Central, Michael Welsh, has landed the job of Chairman of another NHS Trust in the North West."

more follows

The MP continued: "The Government has taken power away from locally elected representatives and handed control over to Tory supporters who will toe the Tory Party line. Every year over £52 billion of our money is spent by Tory appointed quangos. We don't know who is on many of these quangos and we don't have any say over where the money goes. All we do know is that they pay themselves handsomely. It's a racket."

Note to Editors: The Tory Party and the Tory Government are steeped in sleaze the never **never** land of things that aren't illegal but aren't right. More and more they pretend to serve the country while giving top priority to serving themselves and their friends.

PRIVATISATION: Privatisation has transferred important public services into private hands. The public assets were usually sold off at half their real value. Then the directors, with Tory Government foreknowledge and approval, started giving themselves enormous pay increases and perks. Some bosses are paying themselves five or six times what they used to get while also benefiting from share options worth millions of pounds.

Tory ex-Cabinet Ministers have also done well out of this process by getting directorships with companies they privatised. These include Norman Tebbit with British Telecom, Peter Walker with British Gas, Lord Young with Cable & Wireless and Norman Fowler with the National Freight Corporation.

PARLIAMENT: One Tory MP was jailed for trying to fiddle even more profit out of a privatisation share issue. Two Tory MPs were revealed to have agreed to receive £1,000 for putting down a Parliamentary Question. Several Tory MPs have refused to comply with the rules of the House which require them to disclose details of their involvement in Lloyd's insurance syndicates.

It has been calculated that Tory Peers serving on quangos receive between them almost £650,000 in fees.

THE BBC: Marmaduke Hussey, the present Chairman of the Governors of the BBC, is the brother-in-law of Cabinet Minister William Waldegrave. His predecessor, Stuart Young, was the brother of Lord Young, then a Tory Cabinet Minister.

PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS: Because local people elected representatives the Tories didn't like, they abolished the Greater London and other Metropolitan County Councils. Now they are reorganising local government in Scotland and Wales to try to give themselves party advantage. They have grabbed many powers from local councils and removed elected representatives from local hospital and health service boards of management.

Instead, they have handed more and more power over to unelected quangos stuffed with people appointed in secret to do the bidding of their Tory masters - often with little or no local knowledge or connection.

Between them, these quangos control one fifth of public spending - over £50 billion - but they are not accountable to local people. Unlike local councils, they conduct their debates and make their decisions in private. Unlike local

councillors the members of quangos are not financially responsible for their spending decisions.

Local health authorities and hospital trusts are becoming notorious for their poor budgetary control and for scandals over the purchase of computer systems. Even where financial control is properly exercised, hospital trusts clearly give top priority to Government policies at the expense of local patients and staff.

269/94: For Immediate Release: 19 October 1994

PENDLE MP TO LEAD TRESPASS IN "ACCESS TO LAND" CAMPAIGN

One of Pendle's "no go areas" which is out of bounds to the general public is to feel the tramp of feet this Sunday (23 October) when local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be leading a peaceful trespass over some of Pendle's uncultivated moorland at Whitemoor, above Salterforth.

The MP commented: "Uncultivated moorland - which isn't home to rare plants or flowers or animals or birds that need protection - should be regarded as open country. This is already the law in Scotland but not down here. The public should be able to wander freely in open country and the mere fact of ownership should not, in itself, allow access to be restricted. There should be other sound reasons."

"Some people have sought to draw comparisons between this and the invasion of privacy that would be involved in tramping through someone's private garden. The two are simply not comparable. In my ramble on Sunday I will be able to point out public rights of way that have been blocked off and moorland that is out of bounds to the public for no good reason at all."

The MP continued: "An incoming Labour Government will legislate to give the public a right to roam - with all the safeguards needed to protect farmed land, flora and fauna and water catchments and so on."

"Even at present, land ownership is not absolute. Electricity and phone lines, gas and water pipes can be run across land and, of course, public rights of way may exist."

Note to Editors: The walk will set off at 12 noon from the Fanny Grey Hotel, Higher Lane, Salterforth on Sunday 23 October."

270/94: For Immediate Release: 20 October 1994

MP DEMANDS FULL DISCLOSURE OF PARLIAMENTARY "CONSULTANCIES"

A three month long campaign by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to flush out details of the Parliamentary Consultancy awarded by North West Water to Tory MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton, has run into the sand as both the Tory MP and the Chairman of the privatised water company, Sir Desmond Pitcher, remain tight-lipped about the relationship.

Today the Pendle MP tabled a Commons Motion demanding full disclosure of the consultancy. "Today's fresh revelations about Neil Hamilton MP and Tim Smith MP are immensely damaging. The latter took money for tabling questions, the former denies it all but we wait to see what unfolds. How much more sleaze is there just waiting to emerge from the shadows?"

"The Register of Members Interests is, quite frankly, totally inadequate. We need to know precisely what MPs do to deserve these so-called "parliamentary consultancies" and we need to know what they get paid."

"My campaign for openness starts with North West Water who have been inflicting water torture on my constituents for years. My motion simply calls for full disclosure of what Sir Malcolm does for the company and how much he gets paid."

In July, the Pendle MP wrote to the water chief following the "Parliamentary Questions for cash" scandal involving two Tory MPs. He demanded details of the Parliamentary Consultancy awarded by North West Water to Tory MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton.

The MP added: "Since privatisation, North West Water has increased the average bill by 75% - the second highest increase in the country. The average bill in 1989/90 was £111. This year it is £182. "

Note to Editors: • The July 18 letter to Sir Desmond Pitcher reads:

Call for full disclosure

"I know you will share my concern at recent revelations about Conservative Members of Parliament taking money for tabling Parliamentary Questions. Fortunately, the practice has come to light and the whole sordid issue is being referred to the Committee of Privileges. It beggars belief that this sort of thing has been going on under our very noses and I shall be pressing for this corrupt practice to be outlawed. Our constituents do not send us to Parliament for our palms to be greased by undisclosed private interests.

In the Commons debate last week, concerns were also raised about so-called Parliamentary Consultancies. Although the Register of Interests lists these, there is no indication of the value of these consultancies to the MP nor the nature of the consultancy itself. It has been suggested that this may amount to no more than booking House of Commons dining rooms and hosting the occasional dinner for corporate clients.

It is in this connection I write to you. I understand that Sir Malcolm Thornton MP is a Parliamentary Consultant to your company and I would be grateful if you could let me know what precisely this involves and what remuneration Sir Malcolm receives. In view of what has come to light recently, I think it is in the public interest for this information to be released."

• Sir Desmond Pitcher replied on 16 August 1994 as follows:

"Thank you for your letter of 18 July. I understood you sent a copy of the letter to Radio Merseyside* and therefore since they subsequently interviewed me I have already indicated publicly that it would be a breach of commercial confidence to disclose the arrangements the company has with any third party..."
(* incorrect)

• On 19 August 1994, the Pendle MP wrote to the Conservative MP for Crosby, Sir Malcolm Thornton, as follows:

"After all the goings on in the House last month concerning the *"Parliamentary Questions for cash"* affair, I had a number of constituents contact me about your parliamentary consultancy with North West Water. The matter was reported in the press and you should know that I wrote to Sir Desmond Pitcher to ask if he could let me have details of the consultancy and what it actually involves. I also asked him if you received any remuneration."

"I have today received a letter from Sir Desmond to say that he is unable to let me have this information as *"it would be a breach of commercial confidence to disclose the arrangements the company has with any third party."*

"It may be that you, likewise, feel unable to say any more about the arrangements and obviously it is not for me to press you on this. But given that so many constituents have raised the matter with me (perhaps on the back of all the dreadful problems we seem to be having with North West Water) I thought it only right to write to you."

- On 9 September 1994. Sir Malcolm wrote to Gordon Prentice MP as follows:

> "Thank you for your letter of 19 August concerning my parliamentary consultancy with North West Water. Sir Desmond did, in fact, write to me to say that he had received your letter and enclosed a copy of his reply to you - a reply which I feel is entirely appropriate. I am grateful to you for taking the trouble to keep me informed. Kind regards."

- The Commons motion tabled today by the Pendle MP reads:

> "This House deplores the refusal of Sir Desmond Pitcher, Chairman of North West Water, to disclose to the Member for Pendle details of the duties and remuneration of its parliamentary consultant on the grounds that this would be "a breach of commercial confidence" and believes people in the North West who pay handsomely for water supplied by the company have a right to know what advice, expertise and specialisms are brought to bear by such a consultant and how much that consultant gets paid."

271/94: For Immediate Release: 20 October 1994

ARCHER ESCAPES COMMONS SCRUTINY

An attempt in the Commons today by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to get an early debate on insider share dealing was blocked by the Leader of the House, Tony Newton MP who said the matter had already been dealt with by the Prime Minister. The Pendle MP said the allegations surrounding former Tory Party Vice Chairman and novelist, Jeffrey Archer, were crying out to be aired.

Prentice told the House the law on insider dealing was hopelessly inadequate. "If it allows Archer to escape conviction it will allow anyone to."

The MP said afterwards: "The Archer affair won't go away. It will haunt the Conservatives."

"It sticks in my throat that thousands of my constituents would have to work for 13 years and more to make the same amount of money Archer fiddled in 48 hours."

Note to Editors: The Early day Motion reads:

I595 CONDUCT OF LORD ARCHER OF WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Mr Alistair Darling
Mr Gordon Prentice and others

That this House believes that the public is entitled to a full explanation by Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare as to the circumstances surrounding the purchase by him of shares in Anglia Television; believes that Lord Archer should give such an explanation without further delay, further believes that

his conduct and the handling of the investigation by the DTI has further undermined the effectiveness of the United Kingdom's insider dealing legislation; calls on the Government to introduce new legislation free from the taint of political interference; calls on the President of the Board of Trade to publish that part of the DTI report containing information provided in connection with this matter; and regrets that the facts and circumstances of the affair were not put before a jury.

272/94: For Immediate Release: 24 October 1994

MP CLEARS A PATH THROUGH PENDLE'S "NO-GO" AREAS

A thirty strong band of keen ramblers and hill walkers braved atrocious weather last Sunday to join local MP, Gordon Prentice, in his trespassing trek across bleak moorland at Whitemoor - one of Pendle's "no-go" areas where access is barred to the general public. It was part of the MP's campaign to win public access to Britain's "heath, moorlands and mountains".

The MP said: "The ramble had two primary objectives. First to highlight the lack of access to open moorland. Second, to remove obstacles blocking public rights of way. On two occasions I had to snip through barbed wire that had been strung across a public right of way. There were other obstacles such as electrified fences but we managed to successfully negotiate our way around these."

"I have written to the local council asking them to ensure these rights of way are opened up and the obstacles course we came across is dismantled."

"So far as Whitemoor is concerned, there is no good reason why public access should be denied up there. Why should people be made to feel they are on the receiving end of a big favour just to breath fresh air on a high moor or on a mountain top which happens to be "owned" by someone else? The law is out of date and needs to be changed as more and more people find their recreation in the countryside."

The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Tuesday, 25 October 1994

Dear Mr Major

I was present in the House today to hear your statement on the new Standing Committee on standards of conduct in public life and I welcome this initiative.

Unfortunately, I failed to catch the Speaker's eye in the subsequent round of questions to you but, if I may, let me make my point here. Given the new Committee's report is not expected for at least six months, can I ask if you will encourage Members of Parliament who are also "Parliamentary Consultants" to

volunteer to the public and press details of the nature of their consultancies and the remuneration they carry.

My request is prompted by the refusal of the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, and the company's "Parliamentary Consultant", Sir Malcolm Thornton MP, to make available to me Sir Malcolm's duties and his remuneration. Sir Desmond tells me it would be a breach of "commercial confidence". Most of my constituents pay their water bills to North West Water and I see no reason why I should not have this information. I have raised my concerns on the Order Paper and you may have seen my Early Day Motion on the subject (No 1622).

It is a modest request and, given your statement today, I can see no reason why you should not support it. I believe the disclosure of this information may begin to restore public confidence which has been so badly shaken by the recent revelations.

Yours sincerely

GORDON PRENTICE MP

274/94: For Immediate Release: 26 October 1994

COUNCIL REVIEW COMES DOWN FOR "NO CHANGE" IN LANCASHIRE

The Local Government Commission is recommending no change to the structure of councils in Lancashire. The Commission - charged by the Government with the task of redrawing the local authority map of England - originally wanted to abolish Lancashire County Council and see Pendle join with Burnley and Rossendale to form a new council delivering all council services.

The Commission's recommendations, released today, now go to Environment Secretary, John Gummer, who can accept them or send them back to the Commission again for further consideration.

Last June, local MP, Gordon Prentice, said he was deeply disappointed that the Commission had ignored the overwhelming view of people in Pendle who clearly wanted their own unitary authority on present boundaries.

The MP said: "I have always been in favour of unitary councils delivering all local services but I was never prepared to give the Government a blank cheque. The Commission's original proposals for North Yorkshire - just across the County boundary from my own constituency - were totally off-the-wall. People have got to feel comfortable with their own local authority and they need to feel it speaks for them."

In July, Prentice, who chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's backbench Environment Committee which deals with council matters, warned that the Government's shake up of local authorities could stall as the range of opinion hostile to the proposals extended day by day.

The MP said: "The conduct of the review has been disastrous from start to finish. It has cost an absolute fortune and Sir John Banham's performance has been woeful. Nevertheless, he shouldn't shoulder the entire blame. The Government didn't give clear instructions to him at the outset. They then chopped and

changed the guide-lines in the middle of the whole exercise. And then it was all speeded up.

"I've always been sceptical of the two tier council structure. People are confused about who does what. In local government we need accountability and transparency. People need to know where power lies and how it can be influenced. That is the bottom line."

Note to Editors: Set out below are the five key principles guiding the Labour Opposition's position on the review.

• that the Review will be thorough and genuinely cover the country as a whole; that there will be no 'cherrypicking' of areas such as Cleveland, Humberside, Derbyshire or Avon; that the Review will be completed; that recommendations will be acted upon; and that consistent principles will be adopted throughout.

• that there should be no gerrymandering of specific boundaries for narrow, party political advantage.

• that in shadow authorities there should be all-out elections from day one.

• that in subsequent years a third of the Council should be up for election annually.

• that the Government should meet the reasonable representations made to them by the Staff Commission about the way in which staff are treated when their jobs have been changed as part of the reorganisation.

275/94: For Immediate Release: 27 October 1994

CRIMINAL JUSTICE BILL SET TO BECOME LAW

The controversial Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill after completing all its Parliamentary stages on Tuesday. It is expected to receive Royal Assent next week.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been a vocal critic of the Bill and predicts it will cause more problems than it solves. The MP said: "The Bill is a rag-bag of measures aimed at hitting groups which are unpopular with the blue rinse brigade at the Conservative Party Conference audience rather than tackling the soaring crime wave afflicting the country."

"There were some parts of the Bill we nevertheless welcomed. It lowers the age of consent for homosexual men from 21 to 18. It establishes a framework for DNA testing; it tackles computer pornography and ends the practice of judges

suggesting that women witnesses in rape trials might in some way be *unreliable"*.

"However, other measures are indefensible. The Act will set up privatised mini-prisons for young offenders and it will undermine the centuries old right to silence. It criminalises trespass, repeals the Caravan Sites Act and removes the trade union rights of prison officers. Measures to tackle young offending are notably absent from the Bill.

"Some people have questioned Labour's decision to abstain on the second reading of the Bill (the first stage of its Parliamentary consideration) and it clearly was not an easy decision for the Shadow Cabinet. Where the purpose of a Bill is clear - to privatise the railways or to centralise control of the police - outright opposition is an unambiguous position. That is why the Opposition voted against the Police Bill. In the case of the Criminal Justice Bill Tony Blair took the view that it was far more important for us to distinguish which elements we opposed, which elements we agreed with and which we wanted to amend." *More Follows*

Criminal Justice Bill

Note to Editors:

Raves: Labour believes that allowing licensed events is a more sensible approach than driving youth culture underground. Those who make money through organising an event should be required to observe health and safety standards (toilets, ventilation, fire precautions). The venue and planning of such events should take into consideration those in the vicinity who would rather spend their nights sleeping than listening to loud music.

The Bill does not apply to licensed events, so where the local council is satisfied that the above criteria are met, events can go ahead. The Opposition was concerned that the current licensing procedure should be improved and that in certain areas there will be prejudice against events happening at all, but tackling those problems was not something we could do through this Bill.

Travellers. The net result of the Government's proposals can only be an increase in confrontation: a return to the sixties before the Caravan Sites Act was passed. The key is the repeal of that Act, which will reduce the number of sites available.When travellers have nowhere to go, the likelihood of trespass and conflict with the local community increases. With homelessness widespread, allowing the police to confiscate travellers' homes is hardly a solution.

Trespass. The new offence of "aggravated trespass" might make peaceful protest illegal. In announcing this legislation, which he said was aimed at those who disrupt country sports, Michael Howard talked of not allowing "threatening behaviour to go unchecked". While the Opposition would never condone violent or threatening behaviour, the new offence is actually drawn much wider: it will be an offence to do *anything* which is intended to have the effect of obstructing or disrupting any lawful activity.

Although this is extremely broad, it does not necessarily catch hunters who trespass and cause disruption, since, in a fox hunt, the excuse that "the dogs were out of control" might be taken as demonstrating a lack of intentionality, whereas it would be harder for someone who walked across a field to prove that they did not intend to disrupt a shoot in progress or similar event.

What is clear is that a deliberate protest, even if entirely peaceful, could constitute a criminal offence if it took place on private property - which might well include a place of work.

276/94: For Immediate Release: 27 October 1994

HEALTH CHIEFS SLUG IT OUT AS MP STEPS INTO THE RING

The extraordinary scenes at Burnley Health Care Trust where Chief Executive, Maggie Aikman, is trading verbal blows with Chairman, James Rawson, is to be the subject if an urgent top level inquiry by the Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, if local MP Gordon Prentice has his way. Earlier this week, Burnley MP, Peter Pike, quizzed Ministers in the Commons about the dust up.

The Pendle MP is asking the Health Secretary to investigate and make public the circumstances surrounding the row between the two health chiefs in which each called for the other's resignation.

The MP said: "I have never in my life seen anything quite like this. Maggie Aikman alleges that James Rawson called for her resignation on the grounds that she would get another job with her qualifications but he wouldn't! This would be hilarious knockabout stuff were it not so serious."

"Given the Chairman's concern about qualifications, I am also asking Mrs Bottomley to tell me what qualities Ministers identified in James Rawson in deciding to appoint him chairman of the Trust."

"It is one thing after another with the Trust. I thought the dramatic sacking of the consultant Ian Mahady with three hours notice was clear evidence of serious mismanagement. This flare up confirms all is not well at the Trust."

277/94: For Immediate Release: 27 October 1994

NEW MOVES TO ERADICATE MAD COW DISEASE "NOT ENOUGH" says MP

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice has welcomed Government moves to ban from human food the use of the thymus and intensine from calves under the age of six months. The new restrictions come into effect in a few days time on 2 November.

However, the MP claims the ban is not going far enough. "The Government is clearly not doing everything it can to protect consumers. The announcement on 30 June this year that the intestines and thymus of calves under 6 months would be banned from human food is a welcome start. However, the brains, spinal cords and other offal of these calves are still going to go into human food."

The Pendle MP has been waging a long battle to stop the use of calves' offal in human food. There is a long-standing ban on the use of brains, spinal cords and other offal from cattle over the age of six months but this ban has not been extended in full to calves under six months. The MP says this is despite the fact that in July 1990 the House of Commons Agriculture Select Committee recommended that the Government include calf offal in the ban.

Prentice said: "The Minister told me today that the BSE agent has been detected in calves under six months which had been fed large amounts of BSE infected brain material."

Almost four months ago, the Pendle MP accused the Government of dragging its feet in the fight to eradicate BSE - the disease that attacks the brains of cattle turning them to a spongy texture. He said it was as plain as a pikestaff that the Government was not acting quickly and purposefully enough to stamp out the disease.

"It took the Government 18 months from discovering the disease to make it notifiable, 20 months to introduce a compulsory slaughter and compensation scheme, Two and a half years to announce the ban on cattle offal for human consumption, and a further 5 months to implement it. It was 18 months after the

introduction of compulsory slaughter that full compensation was introduced. I am sure the under-compensation paid from August 1988 to February 1990 must have deterred farmers from declaring suspect BSE cases."

Note to Editors: The Minister's reply today to the Pendle MP said: *"There is no scientific evidence that BSE agent can be detected in offals from naturally infected calves under six months of age. However, on 30 June 1994 my Rt Hon friend the Secretary of State for Education announced preliminary results from a pathogenesis study in cattle. These showed detectable infectivity in the terminal ileum of calves six months after experimental oral challenge at the age of four months with a large dose of brain material from confirmed BSE cases. After careful consideration of these results Ministers decided, as a precautionary measure, top extend the specified Bovine offals ban to include the thymus and intestine of all calves presented for slaughter for human consumption. Legislation to enact this will come into force on 2 November 1994."*

Numbers. 128,879 cases of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy ("mad cow disease") have been confirmed on 31,395 UK farms from November 1986, when the disease was first identified, to 13 May 1994. 27% of UK herds have experienced at least one case of BSE (58% of dairy herds, and 13% of beef suckler herds)

Up to lO May 1994, 9,967 cases of BSE had been confirmed in animals born after the ruminant feed bans, imposed on 18 July 1988 in Britain and 11 January 1989 in N Ireland. MAFF states "the majority of these had probably been exposed to ruminant protein in feed".

Costs 1987-1993 To the end of 1993, BSE cost the UK taxpayer £150.1 million, including £96m in slaughter compensation.

The BSE agent and humans. There is as yet no proof that BSE can or cannot cause diseases such as Creuzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in humans. However, BSE type diseases have been found in four other species.

278/94: For Immediate Release: 31 October 1994

MP DEMANDS NO "GAGGING" PAY-OFF FOR HEALTH CHIEF

The dramatic weekend resignation of Maggie Aikman, the Chief Executive of the crisis wracked Burnley Health Care NHS Trust has thrown the troubled Trust into further turmoil. Now Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is demanding that no public money is paid over to Ms Aikman in an attempt to buy her silence.

The MP said: "Over the weekend it was reported that Maggie Aikman was in conclave with solicitors, stitching up a deal which would gag her in return for a cash pay-out. This is simply not on. I intend to raise the matter in Parliament."

"I have today written to the Chairman of the Trust, James Rawson, saying he should on no account sanction any pay-off. I again pressing the Health Secretary to intervene in this grotesque Punch and Judy show."

Note To Editors: Last week, as the story broke, the Pendle MP wrote to the Health Secretary urging her to investigate and make public the circumstances surrounding the row between the two health chiefs in which each called for the other's resignation.

At the time the MP said: "I have never in my life seen anything quite like this. Maggie Aikman alleges that James Rawson called for her resignation on the grounds that she would get another job with her qualifications but he wouldn't! This would be hilarious knockabout stuff were it not so serious."

"Given the Chairman's concern about qualifications, I am also asking Mrs Bottomley to tell me what qualities Ministers identified in James Rawson in deciding to appoint him chairman of the Trust."

279/94

Rt Hon Virginia Bottomley MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

31 October 1994

Dear Mrs Bottomley

I have already urged you to investigate the crisis torn Burnley Health Care NHS Trust and make public the extraordinary circumstances which led to the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Trust each calling for the other's resignation.

Since I made this request things have moved on. The Chief Executive, Maggie Aikman, handed in her resignation following a meeting of the Trust Board last Friday night. She is reported as saying that the terms and conditions of her settlement with the Trust prevent her from discussing the matter.

This surely cannot be allowed to stand. Here we have a Chief Executive, dismissed by her employing NHS Trust, who is, allegedly, prevented from telling her side of the story by the "terms of her settlement". This kind of gagging pay-off is commonplace in the private sector but should be quite alien to the National Health Service. It would be a grotesque misuse of public money. Instead of buying silence, the Trust Board should open itself to scrutiny and explain its actions to the public and press.

I have also written to James Rawson and I am enclosing a copy of my letter for your information.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice MP

280/94:

Mr James Rawson
Chairman
Burnley Health Care NHS Trust
Burnley General Hospital
BURNLEY
Lancashire

31 October 1994

Dear Mr Rawson

People throughout the area have been completely mesmerised by the extraordinary goings on at the Trust. It is quite unprecedented for the Chairman and Chief Executive of an NHS Trust each to call for the resignation of the other.

You will of course know that Peter Pike MP has called on the Secretary of State for Health to intervene and I have also called for an inquiry. I have also asked her to block any gagging pay-off to Ms Aikman. The Lancashire Evening Telegraph indirectly quotes Ms Aikman saying that the terms and conditions of her settlement with the Trust prevent her from discussing the matter. This simply will not do.

I would be grateful if you would let me have details of the contract of employment Ms Aikman had with the Trust together with details of the settlement agreed with her at the time of her resignation.

I am copying this to the Secretary of State for Health.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice MP

cc Peter Pike MP and Janet Anderson MP

281/94: For Immediate Release: 1 November 1994

RIGHTS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE "AT THE TOP OF THE AGENDA" says MP

Veteran Labour MP and longtime campaigner on disability issues, Alf Morris, made an impassioned plea for new rights for disabled people at the annual Sydney Silverman lecture at the weekend.

Speaking at Nelson's Civic Theatre to an audience of local people, the former Minister for the Disabled said the rights of the six and a half million people with disabilities had been neglected for far too long. There are 10,000 people with some kind of disability in every Parliamentary constituency and yet they have been seen as invisible. There is blatant discrimination in the fields of employment, transport and access to buildings - to name but a few - and there is more subtle and discreet bias against disabled people in a thousand other areas."

The Wythenshawe MP said: "The Government says it would cost too much to right these wrongs but the figure of £17 billion has been plucked from the air. The cost of doing nothing is too high."

Local MP Gordon Prentice added: "Alf Morris has done more to advance the cause of the disabled than any other MP. Tragically, Roger Berry's Disability Rights Bill was sabotaged by Conservative MPs earlier this session when they tabled 80 wrecking amendments just when the Bill was poised to become law. We now know these amendments were dreamed up by the Government's own Parliamentary draftsmen - something specifically denied by the Disabled Minister, Nicholas Scott."

"I remember Lady Olga Maitland being hauled up before the House to apologise for telling everyone the amendments she tabled had been all her own work. She confessed they had been drafted by the Government's own advisers. How on earth can people with disabilities have any confidence in this shower?"

282/94: For Immediate Release: 1 November 1994

DAIRY CREST CLOSURE "A CASUALTY OF DEREGULATION" says PRENTICE

The closure of the Dairy Crest Creamery in Longridge in Ribble Valley is a direct consequence of the deregulation of the milk industry which comes into effect today according to Labour's Gordon Prentice, the MP who represents the next door constituency of Pendle.

Prentice said: "I see that Nigel Evans, the Tory MP for Ribble Valley, is "angry" at the decision to close the dairy which, he says, has nothing to do with deregulation."

"I served for ten weeks on the Committee stage of the Deregulation Bill alongside Nigel Evans who saw himself as a great deregulator. Now, when the results come home to roost in his own constituency he manufactures this indignation."

"I have been warning Tories such as Nigel Evans about the risk to jobs and the threat to the daily pinta following deregulation. Now this happens. Nigel Evans will get by but I'm thinking about the 105 people at Longridge who are to lose their jobs because of Tory dogma.

Note to Editors: Last month, the Pendle MP warned the abolition of the Milk Marketing Boards which have run the milk industry in Britain since the 1930s would cost jobs and force up the price of milk. He said the Government wanted to replace them with a private monopoly body run by milk producers. The MP pointed out that even some Conservatives had admitted this could cause prices to rise and lead to uncompetitive practices.

The foundation of Britain's large and efficient milk industry has been the Milk Marketing Boards - statutory bodies set up in the 1930s. Separate Boards cover England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Boards have monopoly powers to buy all milk from dairy farmers in their areas.

The Milk marketing Boards have served the industry well and have had the support of milk producers and the dairy trade. prices have been set at ba level which strikes a balance between the interests of consumers and producers. In addition to collecting milk from the farms, including in remote areas, the Boards have developed processing arms (Dairy Crest in England) which produce the highest quality milk in Europe.

Prentice slates Ribble Valley MP

UK milk consumption at 200 pints per person per year is the highest in the European Union. The output of liquid milk was valued at £3.2 billion in 1993. 33,000 farmers, 16,500 workers in manufacturing and processing and 46,000 jobs in the retail sector are supported by the milk industry.

The European Dimension. In the 1970s the European Commission and a number of European Governments challenged the monopoly role of the Milk Marketing Boards through the Treaty of Rome. The then Labour Government took a determined stand in defence of the Boards and in 1978 secured amendments to EC regulations which ratified the role of the Boards.

In the 1980s an argument developed over whether the fast growing low fat milks market was covered by the Boards. Instead of trying to resolve the problem, the Government used it as an excuse to propose the abolition of the Boards. In fact, the European Court ruled that low fat milks were covered by

the scheme. The British Government still likes to give the impression that European decisions have required the abolition of the Boards. This si not true. The decision to abolish is based on Conservative dogma.

The Agriculture Act 1993 provides for the abolition of the Boards. Labour opposed this Act and argued that if the Government were determined to abolish the current arrangements they should bring forward a replacement themselves. Instead, they left this to the Milk Marketing Boards themselves. In England and Wales, Milk Marque, a voluntary farmers' co-operative will become the dominant buyer of milk from the farmers. The processing arms of the existing Boards are to be sold off.

Gillian Shepherd, the then Agriculture Minister, admitted there was a possibility of Milk marque "abusing its market power in a discriminatory or otherwise unfair manner" and claimed the Office of Fair Trading and the European Commission should keep an eye on them. This was an admission that things could go badly wrong. This is already happening.

283/94: For Immediate Release: 1 November 1994

MPs BITE WATER WATCHDOG

Ian Byatt, the Director General of the water industry watchdog, OFWAT, braved a deluge of criticism from North West Labour MPs when he briefed them earlier today on his work as Regulator.

Mr Byatt told the MPs that over the next ten years in the North West the cost of improving the quality of water and supply would rise by 26% but he was asking for increased efficiency from the industry to reduce costs by 12%. Overall, the bill would increase by just under 14% which, he says, would largely be spent on sewerage.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said afterwards: "People in Pendle have been soaked by North West Water and they're fed up with it. The company is using the talents and expertise of some of its employees on projects outside its core business - providing water and sewerage to people in the North West of England. To hear about North West Water investing in Malaysia instead of here at home makes people hopping mad."

"I also took the opportunity to ask Ian Byatt if North West Water's Parliamentary Consultant, Tory MP for Crosby, Sir Malcolm Thornton, had ever been in touch with him about any matter over the past year. Mr Byatt couldn't recall any approach. For my part, I am still trying to find out what Sir Malcolm does and how much he gets paid. North West Water won't tell me and neither will Sir Malcolm. I've also approached the Prime Minister but he told me today it is not a matter for him."

284/94: For Immediate Release: 2 November 1994

KASHMIR PRIME MINISTER CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST ATROCITIES

The Prime Minister of the Azad Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Mr Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan, told MPs at Westminster today that

he had no knowledge of the Kashmiri militant group, Al Hadeed, that kidnapped the three British tourists that were freed by Indian police yesterday. He told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, he deplored these kidnappings which could not be justified and obscured the real issue - the continued occupation of Kashmir by India.

The Pendle MP said: "Mr Khan told us that, in his view, the elections promised by the Indian Government next year were no solution. What was required was a plebiscite to allow the people of Kashmir to decide on their own future. Mr Khan said the last elections in 1989 had a miniscule 2% turnout and a shortage of candidates who had to declare beforehand allegiance to the Indian constitution."

"He also painted a vivid picture of the atrocities being carried out in Kashmir by the 600,000 strong Indian army. Almost every family there has been touched by the violence in some way. I shall be renewing my demand for purposeful action by the British Government to help swing international opinion behind a plebiscite. The future of Kashmir cannot be decided over the heads of the Kashmiri people."

"I have many constituents in Pendle who are desperately concerned about what is happening over there."

Background note for Editors: Kashmir is the site of a long running dispute between India and Pakistan, which have had rival claims over the territory since the partition of India in 1947. At that time, predominantly Moslem Kashmir was expected to become part of Pakistan. However, as a princely state, its Hindu ruler was allowed to choose his allegiance. After some prevarication, he chose to join India, the predominantly Hindu part of the subcontinent. Part of the state rebelled, however, and came to form the partially autonomous Pakistani state of Azad Kashmir ('free' Kashmir), the remainder being known as the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Kashmir

As India and Pakistan disputed their respective rights in relation to the area, the UN called for a plebiscite to determine its fate. The two countries agreed in principle, but could not agree over the logistics of such a vote. In 1948, Pakistan invaded Kashmir and war resulted. The ceasefire again provided for a plebiscite, but again it did not take place. In 1965, Pakistani incursions again led to war as India retaliated with an invasion of its own into Pakistan.

In 1972, the settlement of the third Indo-Pakistan war, over East Pakistan/Bangladesh, led to the Simla Agreement. This stipulated that the line of control resulting from the 1971 ceasefire be respected without prejudice to the claims of either side and that 'the two countries are resolved to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them' Pakistan maintains an insistence on upholding UN Resolutions calling for a plebiscite, while India rejects this.

Note 2 for Editors: In July the Pendle MP sponsored the following Commons motion:

> That this House welcomes the joint initiative taken by the All Party British Parliamentary Kashmir Group, the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, the Congressional Human Rights Foundation and parliamentarians in a number of other countries in reminding the world community that the Kashmir dispute remains unresolved and that the abuse of human rights and loss of innocent lives continues; calls on all parties to the dispute to abide by international standards of human rights and humanitarian law and cease extra-judicial killings, torture and other malpractices; urges the Indian Government to restore the due process of law and recommend and support the initiative of independent and non-governmental organisations in monitoring against human rights abuses; and calls on the governments of both India and Pakistan to recognise and respond to the call for self-determination, a right which was historically promised but has yet to be exercised by the people of Kashmir and to re-activate the role of the United Nations as a catalyst in this process which would include the full participation of the Kashmiri people.

85/94: **Embargoed:** 3 November 1994

MPs SLATE HEALTH CHIEF'S PAY-OFF

The MPs for Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale have slated the pay-off by Burnley Health Care Trust to former Chief Executive, Maggie Aikman, who has reputedly received £250,000 in return for a vow of silence. The MPs have repeated their demand for an urgent, independent inquiry into the management of the Trust.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "We are determined to flush a response out of the Secretary of State for Health who has, to date, disclaimed all responsibility for what is happening in the troubled Trust. There are serious causes for concern and we want to see action. She cannot sit back and allow our local health service to stagger from crisis to crisis."

Note to Editors: The following Early Day Motion appeared in the Commons Order Paper today in the names of Peter Pike MP (Burnley), Gordon Prentice MP (Pendle) and Janet Anderson MP (Rossendale):

> That this House believes that there should be an urgent and independent inquiry into the affairs and management of Burnley Health Care Trust; notes that in September Mr Ian Mahady, a gynaecologist and clinical director, was sacked at 3 hour's notice and offered a cash payment of £100,000 and that despite this being done at the time with the alleged agreement of the Trust Chief Executive, Mrs M. Aikman and Trust Chairman, Mr James Rawson, and with the backing of the Trust Board, on Monday 24 October Mr Rawson asked Mrs Aikman to resign; notes that on Tuesday 25 October Mrs Aikman called on Mr Rawson to resign and said that she was being made the scapegoat; notes that on Friday 28 October she resigned with a cash settlement understood to be in excess of £250,000 and with a clause preventing her from making any comment, notes that on Monday 31 October the Medical Advisory Council of the Trust called for the resignation of the Medical Director, Dr Sam Pickens, who is understood to be willing to go on payment of £1 million; and believes the Trust clearly no longer has the confidence of

the people of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale who see management wrangles and misuse of funds for cash pay-outs to resolve these problems rather than for medical treatment for people within the Trust area.

286/94: For Immediate Release: 3 November 1994

CSA REPORT "VERY DISAPPOINTING" says PRENTICE

Proposals to overhaul the controversial Child Support Agency do not go far enough according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says yesterday's report by the Commons Social Security Select Committee does not measure up to the scale of the task in hand.

The MP said: "The report is a big disappointment. The draft report was gutted by Conservative Members who voted key recommendations by the Chair, Frank Field MP, into the waste basket. Frank Field proposed a disregard for parents with care living on Income Support. That was voted down. He proposed an independent appeals procedure which is long overdue. That was voted down."

"The Labour Opposition has consistently argued for four fundamental safeguards - a more flexible financial formula, the recognition of so called "clean break" settlements, an independent appeal procedure and a disregard to families living on Income Support. Although the Committee agrees that "clean break" settlements need to be taken into account the Government has merely been invited to look at the issue again. The Committee missed a golden opportunity to recommend measures to recast the entire Agency and its work."

The report will now be considered by the Government whose response to the recommendations will be subject to further debate in the Commons.

287/94: For Immediate Release: 3 November 1994

ATTACK ON *The* GUARDIAN "MISPLACED" says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, was one of 38 MPs who voted in the Commons last night not to refer the Guardian's "forged fax" to the Committee of Privileges.

The MP explained: "The Editor of *The* Guardian has admitted it was wrong to use the House of Commons logo and the name of a civil servant in Jonathan Aitken's private office at the Ministry of Defence. He has apologised after being given a tongue lashing by the Speaker and that should be the end of it. However, there is a wider question that still has to be resolved and that is the culpability of Jonathan Aitken who was Minister of Defence Procurement at the time of his famous stay at the Paris Ritz."

"*The* Guardian's Editor, Peter Preston, says he acted in the public interest and to protect his source Mr Fayed - a man previously so close to the Conservatives he gave them £250,000 just before the last General Election."

"Key facts which emerged yesterday show the Conservatives' indignation to be synthetic. We now know the Cabinet Secretary knew about the forged fax on 10 May. If Sir Robin Butler knew the PM knew. The man at the centre of the row, Jonathan Aitken, knew but he was content to "stay cool" about it all. Aitken reportedly said he was consulting Government lawyers about the affair. Was the Attorney General consulted - and when? When did the Leader of the House and the man in charge of Commons business first know? Why did none of these people report the forged fax to the Speaker of the House before now? That is the question that is crying out to be answered."

"The whole business is a distraction. The main point must not be lost sight of. Jonathan Aitken's explanation as to how his Ritz bill was paid is coming apart at the seams. He was under an obligation under the Rules of Procedure for Ministers to declare his stay at the Ritz if the bill was paid by the Saudi businesspeople staying there. He didn't do so."
more follows

Forged Fax Row

"Now that the matter is going to the Committee of Privileges, the Committee is under an obligation to find out the answers. And given the bile with which Tory MPs utter the name "Fayed", the Conservatives should return the £250,000 he gave them in the run up to the last General Election."

"It is a spectacular thing to behold when thieves fall out" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: There is no legal limit on the amount of money that can be donated to political parties nationally although the Labour Party proposes a limit of £5,000 on individual donations and a complete ban on donations from foreign nationals. Mr Fayed's donated £250,000 to the Conservative Party. There is a limit to the amount that can be spent in constituencies promoting individual candidates. This is linked to the number of electors. In Pendle, for example, Gordon Prentice spent £6,354 (limit £6,729). In Huntingdon, John Major spent £8,472 (limit £8,939) and, in Thanet South, Jonathan Aitken spent £6,402 (limit (£7,423).

Mr Fayed's donation could have financed local Conservative Party campaigns in 36 Parliamentary constituencies (taking £7,000 as an average).

288/94: For Immediate Release: 3 November 1994

MP HAILS DECISION ON POST OFFICE

Hints at lunchtime today (Thursday) that the Government is preparing to abandon the privatisation of the Post Office - the flagship legislation for the new Parliamentary session - have been hailed as a victory for commonsense by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"No-one wanted this privatisation except a few Tory zealots. It is a stinging rebuff for Michael Heseltine who staked what was left of his reputation on the privatisation plan. He was forced into publishing a consultation paper before

the summer and, before the nation has details of the results of this exercise - the whole thing is pigeonholed."

"We had it confirmed on BBC's Newsnight last night by Edward Leigh MP, the former Tory Minister responsible for the Post Office, that the privatisation plan wasn't in the 1992 Conservative manifesto - something clear enough for anyone with an eye in their head to see. That alone should have been enough to sink the proposal but the Tories have such a cavalier attitude to election promises that the nation's view hardly seemed to matter."

"The privatisation proposals generated a tremendous amount of extra mail in Pendle. My post bag has never been more swollen. Our local postmen and women will be breathing a sigh of relief - as I will. Now I hope the Government will give the Post Office the greater commercial freedom it seeks - but within the public sector where the organisation belongs."

289/94:

Letter to the Editor - for publication
Lancashire Evening Telegraph
High Street
Blackburn BB1 1HT

4 November 1994

Dear Mr Butterfield

There are inaccuracies in yesterday's story by Bill Jacobs ("MPs' Extras are Brought to Book").

It is said I am sponsored by the GMB who contribute to my election expenses and pay £60 a year to my constituency party. This is incorrect. I am not sponsored by a trade union.

The article refers to my recent visit to Korea as if the news had just broken. I sent the Telegraph details of my visit to Korea before I went there in a press release dated 21 September (copy enclosed). You did not carry the story.

I have also written a report of my visit which I passed to the local press in Pendle. A copy is enclosed which you may wish to publish.

Yours sincerely

GORDON PRENTICE MP

290/94: For Immediate Release: 7 November 1994

MP CALLS FOR HEALTH CHIEF'S RESIGNATION

A call for the resignation of Mr James Rawson, the Chairman of Burnley Health Care NHS Trust, has come from local MP, Gordon Prentice, whose Pendle constituency lies within the area covered by the troubled Trust.

Last Monday (31 October) the MP called on the Board's Chairman to supply details of the settlement agreed between the Trust and the outgoing Chief Executive, Maggie Aikman, whose rancorous resignation triggered the latest crisis.

The MP said: "The reply I received today from Mr Rawson is unacceptable. Mr Rawson should consider his position - as should others on the Board as they are all party to the decisions made in their name."

"Mr Rawson tells me he cannot give me any information about the settlement agreed with Ms Aikman on the grounds that such confidentiality is in her interests as well as those of staff and patients. It may well be in the interests of Ms Aikman that full details of the alleged £250,000 pay-off is kept secret but it is certainly not in the public interest for everything to be kept under wraps."

"I want to see James Rawson go and I have today asked him to consider his position. No-one has any confidence in the present management of the Trust."

"The Health Secretary has now told me she has no plans to intervene. And when I asked her what qualities she took into account in deciding to appoint Mr Rawson as Chairman of the Trust, I was simply told it was because of his performance as Chairman of the Trust between 1 December 1991 and 31 November 1993. As bald as that - after all the turmoil we have been witnessing."

more follows

MP demands Health Chief's resignation

"We are all being treated as if we are seven year olds. The Trust seems to think some things have to be discussed - but not in front of the children. The public interest demands full disclosure" said the MP.

Note to Editors:

On 31 October the Pendle MP wrote to Mr Rawson as follows:

> "People throughout the area have been completely mesmerised by the extraordinary goings on at the Trust. It is quite unprecedented for the Chairman and Chief Executive of an NHS Trust each to call for the resignation of the other.
>
> You will of course know that Peter Pike MP has called on the Secretary of State for Health to intervene and I have also called for an inquiry. I have also asked her to block any gagging pay-off to Ms Aikman. The Lancashire Evening Telegraph indirectly quotes Ms Aikman saying that the terms and conditions of her settlement with the Trust prevent her from discussing the matter. This simply will not do.

> I would be grateful if you would let me have details of the contract of employment Ms Aikman had with the Trust together with details of the settlement agreed with her at the time of her resignation.
>
> I am copying this to the Secretary of State for Health."

In an undated letter to Gordon Prentice received on 7 November, Mr Rawson wrote:

> "Thank you for your letter of 31 October 1994 concerning Mrs Aikman's resignation. Both parties have agreed that no further statement will be made on the issue and this letter is to apologise to you for being unable to give you further details. It is my intention to respect the confidentiality agreement with Mrs Aikman because this is certainly in her interest as well as that of staff and patients. A period of calm will help all concerned."

On 7 November, the Pendle MP wrote to Mr Rawson as follows:

> I received your undated letter today following my earlier one to you of 31 October concerning Mrs Aikman's resignation.
>
> I note that you are not prepared to let me have the information I have requested and you tell me it is in the interests of Mrs Aikman, staff and patients for the confidentiality of the settlement agreed between the Trust and Mrs Aikman to be observed. I do not accept your view. It is in the public interest for this information to be made available.

MP demands Health Chief's resignation

> "You also say that a period of calm will help all concerned and while we all desperately want things to return to an even keel there can be no question of allowing you and the Trust Board to batten down the hatches in the hope that recent events can be quietly forgotten.
>
> I am asking you to consider your position as Chairman of the Trust. After all that has happened I do not believe you can continue in that position.
>
> Either way, I intend to raise the issue in the Commons."

<u>291/94: For Immediate Release: 8 November 1994</u>

EURO LAW WILL KILL OFF HERBAL MEDICINE says PENDLE MP

Pendle's aromatherapists and medical herbalists have received a major shock to the system. A hitherto unknown Euro law due to come into force at the beginning of 1995 will close down herbalists and threaten the livelihoods of those in allied professions such as aromatherapy.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has vowed to challenge the new regulations which he says will deal a body blow to herbalists whose ancient trade has been

practised for centuries. "In this country herbalists have rights of practice going back to the Herbalists' Charter of 1543. Now this is all to be set to one side in the name of uniformity and the single market. It's not on."

The MP continued: "I am in touch with the Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, to get the whole thing spiked. Millions of people rely on so called "alternative medicine" and it is simply unthinkable that a stroke of the Euro pen can clear the shelves of traditional herbal remedies."

"Herbal remedies should continue to be exempt from the regulations that apply to conventional medicines."

Note to Editors: Euro regulations are generally incorporated into UK domestic law by way of Statutory Instrument made under s2(2) of the European Communities Act. Euro regulations which require a major change in UK domestic law need to go through the Westminster Parliament to be enacted by new primary legislation.

The Institute of Medical Herbalists told the Pendle MP that at a meeting with members of the herb industry on 21 September, Health Department officials announced that their lawyers had just discovered that Section 12 of the 1968 Medicines Act had to be changed because it conflicted with a European Directive (65/65) due to come into force at the beginning of 1995.

Because of this, they said they would be seeking the immediate repeal by Parliament of s12 of the 1968 Medicines Act which gives herbal practitioners and companies the right to supply herbal medicines without a medicines' licence. This would mean that from 1 January 1995 all processed herbal medicines would require a medicines' licence. The IMH says the

Herbalists Choke on Euro Law

Health Department is planning, without warning, to reverse legislation passed after lengthy public and parliamentary debate in 1968.

The Institute of Herbal Medicine writes:

> "Despite the fact that we met last December with the Under Secretary of State for Health to discuss the very sections of of the Medicines Act now under threat, the Department of health failed to invite any herbal practitioners to this first meeting. Following protests, a further meeting took place... civil servants said that herbal practitioners could continue to give their medicines after personal consultation with a patient without a medicines' licence but that any products that were "industrially produced" (ie treated in a way beyond simple drying, cutting or powdering) would be considered medicines and would have to have a licence.
>
> While this means that herbal practitioners can still buy dried or fresh herbs from suppliers - processed herbs including tinctures, pills, concentrates, capsules and ointments would all require a licence if sold by a herb company to a practitioner. Herbal practitioners may continue to use tinctures, pills and ointments made on their own premises for their own patients without a licence because they are not "industrially produced" and are not put on "the market".

The ramifications of this are potentially devastating... suppliers will be forced out of business. Worst of all, hundreds of thousands of patients will suddenly find that medicines on which their well-being depends have been withdrawn. Herbal medicines are effective in treating many chronic diseases which orthodox medicine cannot cure.

A medicines' licence is designed for the sale of orthodox drugs which can make fortunes for the drugs companies. The administrative fee alone demanded by the Department of health is £84,000. When you consider that plants cannot be patented it is obvious that this money can never be recouped by herbal companies.....

292/94: For Immediate Release: 9 November 1994

MP TAKES PENDLE COUNCIL TO THE OMBUDSMAN

In an unprecedented move, local MP Gordon Prentice is to take Pendle Council to the Ombudsman alleging maladministration over the repair of a street light.

The local government Ombudsman - the watch-dog that keeps an eye on councils - is to be asked to investigate the complaint brought by a Brierfield woman whose car was smashed to bits last October in an accident outside her home. The woman - Mrs Brierley of 33 Sefton Street - reported the street light outside her home was not working. A week later, a driver crashed into her car which was parked under the allegedly faulty street lamp a few feet from her front door. The driver sped off into the darkness.

The MP explained: "When my constituent heard the crash and the loud scrape of metal against metal she ran outside and saw the outline of a car speeding away into the darkness. She says the street light was out and she was unable to make out the car number plate as it disappeared into the distance. She says the Council was negligent and should compensate her."

The MP continued: "I have a file on this case which is half an inch thick and, so far as I'm concerned, I've reached the end of the road. I have decided to pass my file over to the Ombudsman for an independent assessment. There are two issues. The first is the question of the street light. Was it or was it not repaired? The Council says it was repaired the day after it was reported faulty. My constituent and others who live in the very same street say it wasn't. This is a simple question of fact that has to be resolved one way or the other."

"The second issue concerns liability. In my bundle of correspondence with the Council I have a copy of a letter sent to my constituent on 18 February 1994 which says: *"The Council has a general responsibility to provide street lighting. If a light goes out then the Council has to have a reasonable time in which to see*

more follows

to its repair. If the Council took an undue length of time to repair a light once the defect had come to its notice then it may well be liable."

On 21 April I received a letter from the Council telling me that a *"perfectly proper"* response to a report of a faulty street light would be *"to switch it off*

or remove it altogether". This seems to me an astonishing response. We should all be grateful that the Council deigns to provide street lighting at all!

"Then on 2 November 1994 the Council delivered its coup de grace when it told me - almost one year after I first raised the issue -that *"the law is quite clear that the authority is not liable for accidents which arise from a failure to light for whatever reason."* This is an extraordinarily bold and unequivocal claim which offends against common sense. If true, the law needs to be changed.

"In my experience, a lot of people are totally exasperated by Pendle Council which sometimes acts in a black and white, take it or leave it, kind of way."

"This is not an isolated case. We all remember the famous example of council high-handedness over the summer when the owner of the Parish tea rooms in Colne was ordered to take her cafe tables indoors which she placed outside on sunny days - even though the pavement was 15 feet wide outside her cafe and could not conceivably be causing an obstruction. The Council has now relented and is thankfully showing a bit of common-sense, flexibility and give and take."

The MP added: "I want to see the warm, human face of Pendle Council - instead of the hard, immovable, bureaucratic, legalistic one so many people are confronted with."

293/94: For Immediate Release: 8 November 1994

MP CLEARS A PATH THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE

Over 39,000 kilometres of public rights of way in England may be blocked and unusable according to Environment Minister, Robert Atkins. He admits about half that number are thought to be the responsibility of landowners.

Local MP Gordon Prentice - known as a keen campaigner for greater countryside access - said today he was shocked by the scale of the problem. "I asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment had been made of the number of public rights of way that have been blocked or otherwise obstructed by landowners since 1984. The information I was given comes from a major survey of the condition of the network in 1988."

"I am told the Countryside Commission has a further survey in hand and this is reassuring. We will at least be able to measure the progress that is being made in clearing obstacles from the nation's public footpaths."

Three weeks ago, the MP, who chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee, led a group of ramblers over parts of Pendle's "no-go areas" which are out of bounds to the general public. Prentice is pledged to introduced an Access to Land Bill if he is successful in the annual ballot of Private Members Bills on 24 November.

294/94: For Immediate Release: 9 November 1994

TAX BOMBSHELL SET TO EXPLODE IN BUDGET predicts PENDLE MP

With the Budget looming on 29 November, local MP, Gordon Prentice, launched a stinging attack on Conservative economic policy at a Labour Party meeting last night in Reedley.

The MP said: "The Conservatives are the Party of high taxation. They say they believe in low taxes. In 1978/98 the ratio of tax to GDP was 34.3%; in 1995/6 it will be 37%. In 1978/9 a family on average income paid 35.2% of gross income in tax. In 1992/3 it paid 36.2%."

"The Conservatives are the Party of unfair taxation. Nowadays, taxes are far more regressive. Only those earning more than £64,000 a year pay less tax now than they did in 1979. The top 1% of earners (£120,000+) are only paying 4% of the tax announced in the 1993 Budget. But they got 30% of the tax cuts since 1979. That's £75 billion - an average of £300,000 each."

"As everyone now knows, the Tories are the Party of VAT. They have more than doubled VAT since 1979. the typical family will pay over £1,250 in VAT. That is £715 more in real terms than under Labour - if people can remember that far back. The Tories next step is to extend VAT to food, children's clothes and books."

"To cap it all, the Conservatives are the Party of falling living standards. Between July and September this year, British families experienced the sharpest decline in living standards in 13 years. Personal disposable income fell by 1.8%."

The Labour MP concluded: "So, what's the answer? Our principles are clear and simple. We want fair tax - not high tax. Tax should be related to ability to pay. And all the gaping tax loopholes that let the super rich away with murder should be plugged."

295/94: For Immediate Release: 10 November 1994

BOOKS ARE FUN! says PENDLE MP

Books are great fun according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. That's the message he will be delivering next Wednesday (16 November) at West Street County Primary School in Colne when he officially opens the library at 7pm. A concert follows with the school choir performing "Giant Finn" (years 2 and 3) and "Jack in the Beanstalk" (years 4, 5 and 6).

The library opening is the centre-piece of a week long festival of books at the school.

The MP said: "Books have the answers to all the interesting things we wonder about or ask about every day. A library is a marvellous treasure store - full of all sorts of fascinating information about everything under the sun."

"This week long festival of books is an exciting event" said the MP.

Note to Editors and Photographers. Contact Mr L.A. Howarth, Headteacher on 0282 865840

296/94: For Immediate Release: 15 November 1994

BBC NORTHWESTMINSTER

The Queen's Speech, the crisis in the local NHS and performance related pay for Members of Parliament will all feature on the BBC North West regional Parliamentary programme **Northwestminster** this Sunday (20 November) at 2.00pm.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be in the studio in Manchester giving his views on these and other topical issues.

Northwestminster is on air from 2pm - 2.30pm.

297/94: For Immediate Release: 15 November 1994

PENDLE MP TO MEET BENAZIR BHUTTO

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, later this month at a special meeting at Westminster. The meeting, organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, will be held on Tuesday, 29 November at 6pm in the CPA Rooms in Westminster Hall.

The Pendle MP is a member of the British - Pakistan Parliamentary Group and takes a close interest in developments in the sub-continent.

The MP said: "I am looking forward to this immensely. There are many people here in Pendle who have close family ties with Pakistan and who retain a keen interest in developments in that country. I know that people are also concerned about what is happening next door in Kashmir where there are many well documented examples of the most terrible infringements of human rights by the Indian army. I will be interested in hearing at first hand from the Pakistan Prime Minister on how she thinks we in the West can help resolve the crisis there which is costing so many lives."

298/94: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1994

PENDLE FARMERS LOBBY MP

Pendle's hill farmers will be joining others from all over England and Wales tomorrow in a mass lobby of Parliament (Thursday) to press for a fairer deal. They say agricultural spending cuts have hit them hard.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who will be speaking to the lobby said: "Our small farmers have had a raw deal. Cuts in the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HCLA) - announced a year ago this month - are causing long term damage to employment in the countryside and to the rural environment."

"HCLA is paid to some of the poorest farmers in the country to compensate them for the permanent hardships they face in some of the most remote parts of the country. In 1992, the Government cut HLCAs for the first time ever and the further cut announced at the end of last year threatens the long term

future of hill farming. Other rural economic activities such as tourism depend on hill farming. The allowance for a hardy breed ewe drops 75p to £5.75."

The MP's action follows a commitment he gave earlier this year to the Nelson and Colne Branch of the National Farmers Union. He pledged to back the hill farmers in their fight for a fair deal.

The MP added: "The lobby comes at a time when agriculture is in turmoil. We've seen the controversy over the Milk Marque - the successor to the Milk Marketing Board - and the threat to animal health from imported disease such as Foot and Mouth and Equine Viral Arteritis."

299/94: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1994

PENDLE MP BACKS BRITISH AEROSPACE BID FOR VSEL

A takeover of submarine and warship builders VSEL by the engineering conglomerate GEC could be a body blow to the defence industry in the North West says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He is backing a rival bid for VSEL from British Aerospace who are major employers in the area.

The MP said: "I am urging the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, and Defence Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, to come down off the fence and recognise GEC's game plan for what it is. GEC's objective is to be the leading player in the UK defence industry even if that means fatally undermining BAe."

"British Aerospace has made out a convincing case why its offer for VSEL should be accepted. And the Consortium of Lancashire Aerospace - representing over 100 aerospace, defence and high technology companies in Lancashire - is backing the bid."

"The Chairman of the Consortium, local aero engine sub contractor, Dennis Mendoros, has told me of his concerns should the GEC bid succeed. He has doubts whether the GEC bid is in the long term interests of the UK Defence industry and he is obviously fearful - as I am - of the implications for the area's sub contractors of which his company, Euravia, is one."

300/94: For Immediate Release: 15 November 1994

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS says MP

The 50p coin could be on the way out and a new £2 coin could be on the way in says local MP Gordon Prentice. He says he wants the views of local people on the Royal Mint's review of the coinage. Their deadline is the turn of the year.

The MP said: "It seems to me that the country has had to cope with more changes to the coinage than I've had hot dinners but since the Royal Mint is asking for everyone's views I feel a responsibility to respond. At the moment, however, I am still undecided about the coins we need and those we can safely dispense with. I initially thought the whole business was relatively straightforward. Far from it - although it is safe to say some of our coins are far too heavy. I do not own a pair of trousers without holes in the pockets!"

"The Mint says there are major constraints on change. They say it is not easy to find slots for new coins and special care must be taken to avoid "slots" which are the same as those in other countries as this can lead to abuse in vending systems. Some of the constraints are blindingly obvious. Coins must roll to make vending machines work so they can't be square or triangular."

"People with ideas on how the currency can be improved should contact me or the Royal Mint (Freepost, PO Box 657, Cardiff CF1 1YY by 30 December 1994."

Note to editors: The Royal Mint says the following general principles should be observed; •THE COINAGE SYSTEM SHOULD BE EASILY UNDERSTOOD •THE COINS THEMSELVES SHOULD COMMEND RESPECT. EXCESSIVELY LIGHT COINS OR THOSE WITH HOLES IN THE MIDDLE ARE NOT POPULAR IN THIS COUNTRY •INDIVIDUAL COINS SHOULD BE READILY DISTINGUOISHABLE BOTH VISUALLY AND BY TOUCH •COINS SHOIULD BE NEITHER TOO LARGE OR TOO HEAVY. HEAVY COINS MAKE HOLES IN POCKETS, THEY INCONVENIENCE THOSE SUCH AS MARKET TRADERS WHO CARRY AROUND LARGE QUANTITIES AND THEY ADD TO TRANSPORT AND SECURITY COSTS •COINS SHOULD BE SUITABLE FOR USE IN METERS AND VENDING MACHINES •COINS SHOULD NOT BE EASILY COUNTERFIETED •PRODUCTION COSTS SHOULD BE KEPT TO A MIN IMUM

301/94: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1994

MP CALLS FOR JOBS AUDIT AS PENDLE JOBLESS TOTAL FALLS

Last month's jobless total in Pendle is the lowest for 43 months. In October there were 2,436 people out of work and claiming benefit. Of these, 1,910 are men and 526 women. The unemployment rate now stands at 6.5%.

Vacancies are sharply up at the Nelson and Colne job centres.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "We must welcome the national fall in unemployment and also the significant reduction here in Pendle. I want to see the downward trend continue. People are fed up with false dawns."

"There are two related issues which still demand attention. The first is the way in which the unemployment figures are calculated. There have been over thirty changes in methodology since this Government came to office and every one - except one - has revised the figures downwards."

"We also need a "jobs audit" to tell us the type of jobs - and their terms and conditions - that are being created locally compared with the ones that have been lost. Who benefits if the new jobs are low skilled and low paid?"

303/94: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1994

QUEEN'S SPEECH HAS "HOLE IN THE MIDDLE" says PRENTICE

Today's Queen's Speech, opening the new session of Parliament, has a hole in the middle says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the privatisation of the Post Office is the "missing Bill".

The MP said: "I heard the Chairman of the Conservative Party, Jeremy Hanley, tell TV viewers earlier today that the privatisation of the Post Office is a "matter of timing" which suggests the whole preposterous proposal has not been killed stone dead as we were led to believe but may be resurrected in future. I think this is another "Hanley gaffe" of the kind we are all getting used to."

The Prime Minister has also let it be known that a defeat on the Euro funding Bill would trigger a General Election so there is clearly an incentive to vote the Bill down. We don't have the Social Chapter, the CAP remains unreformed and on top of it all we have the evidence of Euro fraud on a panoramic scale."

"Women are to be forced to retire at 65 - not because they want to soldier on but to save the Treasury money. The Jobseeker's Allowance will cut all benefits after 6 months adding further anxieties to those who have the misfortune to be among the two and a half million who are unemployed. It was Peter Lilley who said a year ago that *"Generous unconditional help for the unemployed sounds humane. But if it discourages job search and prolongs unemployment it damages people's chances."* The so called Jobseeker's Allowance is to implement that philosophy."

We are also promised a new Bill for disabled people only months after the Government sabotaged Roger Berry's private member's Bill by orchestrating the tabling of over 80 wrecking amendments - even though the Bill was supported by every organisation working with disabled people. There are other poisonous ingredients in this witches brew of a legislative programme but we shall have to wait for the details."

304/94: For Immediate Release: 22 November 1994

MP BACKS PENDLE'S HILL FARMERS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to restore the deep cuts that the Government has made to the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance - a grant that helps keep struggling hill farmers financially afloat.

Prentice said: "At last week's lobby of Parliament I had an opportunity to talk at length with Pendle hill farmers about the problems they face. In this day and age it is an absolute disgrace that so many of our hill farmers have to get by on poverty incomes that simply would not be tolerated in a town or city. Incomes of £5,000 a year are fairly commonplace."

"A *young farmer* in Pendle is in his late forties or early fifties! Hill farming incomes are so appallingly low that young people cannot afford to stay on the land. If nothing is done about this we shall see the number of people working on the land going into free fall in the space of half a generation."

"There is also the problem of maintaining dry stone walls which are such an attractive feature of the Yorkshire Dales in particular. Grants have been progressively cut back and it is becoming very difficult indeed to keep the walls in good repair."

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads: "That this House congratulates the National Farmers' Union for the way it has made its case for restoring hill livestock compensatory allowance to 1992 levels and particularly for its lobby on 17th November; notes that on 30th November 1993 the previous Minister for Agriculture justified cuts in hill livestock compensatory allowances on the grounds that hill farmers' incomes had increased, and that her predecessor used the same justification in his announcement on 17th November 1992; further notes that even in 1992-93 more than 30 per cent. of full-time hill and upland farmers had an annual farm income of less than £5,000 and that higher costs and lower market returns mean hill farmers' incomes have now fallen substantially; believes that hill farmers already have to struggle to make a living, provide vital employment in rural areas and act as stewards of the countrywide; and therefore calls on the Government to restore the hill livestock compensatory allowance fully to its 1992 level."

305/94: For Immediate Release: 23 November 1994

MP BLASTS "MISLEADING" SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES

The publication on Tuesday of school league tables has been criticised by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He said the information on schools in Pendle - as elsewhere - was selective and raw data did little to promote understanding of the pressures and difficulties faced by individual schools.

The MP said: "The tables do not compare like with like and take no account of the success of schools in bringing their students on and developing them. They compare, without any caveats, schools in the most affluent suburbs with struggling inner city schools often starved of resources."

"Information which could shed some light on the contribution that schools can make to improving the education of their pupils is simply not used. Without this, the league tables do not help our understanding of what is going on in our schools. This is the view of education professionals across the entire spectrum of opinion."

Note to Editors: Shadow Education Spokesperson, David Blunkett MP adds:

The Government published its league tables on GCSE and A-Level results on Tuesday 22 November. There are also separate league tables measuring attendance, which for the first time distinguish between permitted absence and truancy. The tables measure the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom. The Government is still undecided about whether league tables will be published for key stage tests at 7, 11 and 14. They are not expected in this school year - so a decision may be postponed until after a General Election. Gillian Shephard has accepted the need to refine the league tables and work has been commissioned from the Institute of Education in London to examine how value added data can help improve performance in schools.

Labour criticism of the Government's Approach. The Opposition believes that the existing league tables are flawed because they take no account either of the circumstances faced by a school or of the way in which schools have boosted the achievement of their pupils. Their purpose has been to knock out low achieving schools in a "market system" rather than to raise standards in those schools.

more follows

Labour's Alternative Approach. The Opposition believes that comparative information should reflect the value added by a school to a pupil's education. The purpose of such information should be to highlight those schools which have achieved considerable improvements and to assist those schools which are not achieving their full potential.

Academic research has stressed the importance of leadership in improving the effectiveness of schools - it is therefore important that headteachers and heads of department in schools enjoy full training and re-training opportunities so that their academic abilities are complemented by good management practice.

There are essentially three additional measures for secondary school league tables which can be used.

1. Socio-economic factors. Difficult because of the expectations that may be lowered, but linguistic issues are obviously relevant. Used at input rather than output level, they clearly have a value. However using free school meals or single parent families as a reason for low performance is not always satisfactory.

2. Comparing school performance. Michael Barber at Keele has done work for the ALA in London boroughs, including Lewisham and Hammersmith and Fulham on how schools performance improvements can be measured year on year.

3. Added value. The Institute of Education has used prior attainment data in Lancashire and West Sussex to develop work in this area. Introducing it across the country will take longer, but the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority will be publishing a report one week after the league tables.

The fact that the Government is examining the importance of added value data shows that they accept that using raw data on its own is not enough.

Many Labour authorities - and the Labour-led local authority associations - have commissioned work on how league tables can be made more relevant. There is considerable work being done at the Institute of Education in London, and at Sheffield and Newcastle Universities on value-added information and we wish to build on their work.

The National Foundation for Educational Research has been commissioned by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to examine how an assessment of the value-added by each school, as measured by GCSE results, can be used to help authorities to improve school quality. Analysis of the 1994 and 1995 exam results will take place initially. Currently fourteen AMA member authorities - mostly in London, but including Walsall and Kirklees - are employing the NFER.

Other authorities have sought to contextualise their results by linking poverty indicators with exam results. Schools have had to publish exam results since 1980. In London, Labour authorities have published comparative information

about schools in their areas - the Association of London Authorities commissioned research earlier this year from Keele University to measure school improvement based on exam results.

League Tables

These are all approaches which offer a more satisfactory result than the existing league tables published in isolation. Labour is particularly keen to see a value-added approach, but welcomes the more readily accessible comparisons being made by Labour authorities using readily available data.

It is important that we maintain high expectations for all our students - especially those in inner city schools for whom education is the most effective way to lift them from poverty. We also wish to enhance the role of OFSTED - the inspectorate - with support from local education authorities - in assisting schools which need to improve their standards.

Labour wishes to provide far more information for parents and the public than the Government alreay provides with a view to raising standards and expectations in all our schools.

306/94: For Immediate Release: 22 November 1994

MP STILL ON THE TRAIL OF LORD ARCHER

Lord Archer - the former Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party and blockbusting millionaire novelist has gone to ground according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Prentice, is furious that Lord Archer is refusing to reply to a letter sent by him back in September in which he quizzed the peer about his share dealings in Anglia Television.

Prentice said: "The Conservative peer has disappeared in a puff of blue smoke and he doesn't even have the grace to answer letters addressed to him at the House of Lords. We were told in September that Lord Archer was to be absent from the Conservative Party's annual conference because he was "too busy" with his duties as a working Conservative peer. That was complete eyewash."

The MP said: "The trail has not grown cold. We know his favourite watering holes and haunts and at some stage he will emerge from the undergrowth where he has been hiding. There are legitimate questions that require answers. Refusing to reply to letters won't make MPs like me go away."

Note to Editors: Lord Archer has been at the centre of a row involving the purchase and sale of shares in Anglia Television just prior to a successful takeover bid by MAI. The move, which netted a profit of £80,000 for an associate of Lord Archer, prompted allegations that the peer had been involved in insider dealing - a criminal offence carrying a maximum jail sentence of seven years. The Chairman of the Tory Party, Jeremy Hanley, told the Financial Times in September that *"Jeffrey will find it is probably better to speak out rather than not."*

Last month the Pendle MP tried unsuccessfully to get an early debate in the House on insider share dealing. The move was blocked by the Leader of the

House, Tony Newton MP who said the matter had already been dealt with by the Prime Minister.

more follows

Lord Archer

Note 2 to Editors
The Early day Motion tabled last month reads:

I595 CONDUCT OF LORD ARCHER OF WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Mr Alistair Darling
Mr Gordon Prentice and others

That this House believes that the public is entitled to a full explanation by Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare as to the circumstances surrounding the purchase by him of shares in Anglia Television; believes that Lord Archer should give such an explanation without further delay, further believes that his conduct and the handling of the investigation by the DTI has further undermined the effectiveness of the United Kingdom's insider dealing legislation; calls on the Government to introduce new legislation free from the taint of political interference; calls on the President of the Board of Trade to publish that part of the DTI report containing information provided in connection with this matter; and regrets that the facts and circumstances of the affair were not put before a jury.

Note to Editors 3: The following editorial "The odd silence of Lord Archer" appeared in the Guardian on 21 November 1994:

BRUCE GROBBELAAR returned to England last week to "face the music" over allegations that he accepted payments in return for letting in goals. Which is more than can be said for Lord Archer who has maintained an almost Trappist silence in his relations with the media since his return from a book promotion tour of the Fareast. A computer scan of Britain's main daily and Sunday newspapers reveals that there have been over 60 references to Lord Archer during the past month but in none of them is he quoted as saying anything at all, let alone something which could throw light on the reasons why he bought shares in Anglia Television which many people would still like to know the answers to. There have been occasional sightings of Lord Archer, most recently in the House of Lords during the Queen's Speech last week, but so far we have been denied access to his explanation of the events leading to his purchase of 50,000 shares of Anglia Television in two tranches in January. Why, out of the hundreds of thousands of shares on offer on the stock markets, did he choose the company of which his wife was a director? The purchases were made by him—though registered in the name of a friend Broosk Saib—only a few days before Anglia was the object of a successful takeover bid which produced a profit of £80,000 on the transactions. The Government has refused to authorise publication of the inspectors' report into Lord Archer's share dealings but this doesn't obviate the need for a frank explanation by him of some of the curiosities of this extraordinary affair. He has admitted a "grave error" in buying shares in Anglia and in causing "needless embarrassment" to

his wife. But he strongly denies that the transaction was carried out with the benefit of any insider information. There must therefore have been other reasons why he didn't use his normal stockbrokers, but chose instead to use a firm with which he had never traded before. We have no new questions to ask, but still wait patiently for answers to some of the original ones. Like why did he buy the

Lord Archer

shares on behalf of his friend Saib when the latter was experienced in buying shares? Second, why did he specify that the deal be done on "new account" dealing? This is more expensive but means that the shares would not have to be paid for until the end of the following Stock Exchange accounting period—thereby opening the prospect that if the shares were sold within the account period at a profit no money would have to change hands. This was risky business because he knew that the shares would have to rise by more than the transactions costs, including the extra charge for new account dealing, before a profit could be made. Remember, on January 13 (when the first of two tranches of 25,000 shares was bought) the shares of Anglia were standing at virtually their year's highest value of £4.85. Was Lord Archer's intention to sell within the account all along (in which case he must have been very confident that something was going to happen to increase the price of the shares) or was he planning that the shares bought on behalf of his friend would be held as a longer term investment? In that event someone would have had to cough up around £242,500 on settlement day. Did Mr Saib have this kind of cash at hand? If he had then why on earth did he need Lord Archer as his bag boy? If Mr Heseltine still refuses to publish the inspectors' report that is regrettable. But that doesn't in any way gag Lord Archer. It is time for him to make a full statement. We still await some pretty good answers.

307/94: For Immediate Release: 22 November 1994

CRISIS AT BURNLEY NHS TRUST TO BE DEBATED IN COMMONS

Burnley MP, Peter Pike, has secured an adjournment debate on the crisis wracked Burnley Health care Trust. The debate will be held on Monday, 28 November and a Health Minister will reply on behalf of the Government.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose own constituency lies alongside Burnley and is also covered by the troubled Trust, said: "I have been pressing for an early debate in the House and I am relieved the Speaker has given Peter the opportunity to raise in the Chamber some of the many questions that remain unanswered. I shall be there too with a quiver full of questions of my own that are crying out for answers."

The MP said: "I have called for the resignation of the Chairman of the Trust, James Rawson. I believe now it is only a matter of time before he goes."

308/94: For Immediate Release: 22 November 1994

EXPLOSION OF ANGER AT BRITISH GAS

British Gas has provoked an explosion of anger amongst its customers in Pendle according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says his mail bag has been bulging with letters from irate gas consumers objecting to the "fine" on those who cannot or choose not to pay their bills by direct debit.

Under the so-called price restructuring, there will be an increase for those not paying by monthly direct debit. The company says this additional cost will amount to 19p per week for the average customer paying £343 per year compared with a possible saving of 17p per week for monthly direct debit payers.

The MP said: "People are fired up about this and are ready to turn up the heat on British Gas - especially after news of the stratospheric 75% pay increase to the Chief Executive, Cedric Brown."

"The Prime Minister washed his hands of the matter in true Pontius Pilate fashion. He told the Commons it was not a matter for him. Yet this scandalous £200,000 salary increase is being paid for by some of the very poorest people in the country."

309/94: For Immediate Release: 23 November 1994

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR HALT TO TAX FIDDLES

A blitz on tax abuses and fiddles has been urged by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster ahead of next week's Budget debate the MP said the extent to which people were "ripping off the state" was a national scandal.

The MP said: "For too many people paying tax is voluntary. They either do or they don't as it takes their fancy. For the rest of us who have to stump up, this is infuriating and unacceptable. The Government must close loopholes that are glaringly obvious to everyone. Inheritance Tax is one of the easiest taxes to avoid as I have been saying for years. If you own half a county, tell the Inland Revenue there is public access across your land - but don't bother to tell anyone else and, hey presto, no inheritance tax."

"We also need a crackdown on the privatised utilities who have been coining it at our expense. The problem for the Government is that the Ministers who privatised the organisations are now sitting in the Boardrooms making vast amounts of money themselves. Lord Tebbit, Lord Walker, Lord Lawson and a clutch of other Conservative Lords and Knights infest the Boardrooms of British industry - often running the very same organisations they were responsible for privatising."

"This is the Government that will do nothing about the 75% pay increase of the boss of British Gas, Cedric Brown, who now gets £475,000 but tells everyone else in the land they must stump up 17.5% VAT on gas and other fuels."

Note to Editors:

AREAS FOR REFORM

A. **Privatised companies:** These have been the floated with a large number of tax breaks Some have been brought to light, as in the case of the water companies. Others are hidden in the small print of documents kept confidential. There must be an open examination of the tax breaks given to the privatised companies. Where excess profits are made a windfall public

dividend should be paid. This should take into account the sale or transfer of National Grid from the Regional Electricity Companies.

B. **Fair distribution of tax reliefs:** The tax system must be reformed so that tax **reliefs for** executive share options are reformed and reliefs for private medical insurance are removed

C. **Offshore Loopholes:** Taxation of non-residents, non-domiciles and those with offshore accounts should be overhauled in line with the recommendations of the Inland Revenue. It is not fair that a wealthy few be allowed to work or live in the UK without making a fair contribution through taxation. The British Chamber of Commerce has called for review of taxation of non-residents. This is long overdue

D. **Capital taxation:** This must be reformed to close loopholes, achieve fair taxation of capital and promote a culture of long term investment.

E. **Stamp duty:** Avoidance of stamp duty, and the role stamp duty could potentially play in encouraging long termism and raising revenue, should be examined. Stamp duty is particularly cost effective to collect and simple to administer. We will not therefore abolish stamp duty on share transactions in 1996 as the Government propose.

F. **Trusts:** The taxation system must be reformed to prevent the abuse of trusts for tax avoidance.

G. **Inheritance tax:** This must be made effective and less easy to avoid, particularly for those who have come to regard it as a voluntary tax.

H. **Corporate taxation** must be simplified and modernised to support the needs of growing businesses and to cut down the increasingly complex and lengthy legislation in this area and the costs of compliance. The principles of reform must be to support sensible policies for industry and business, stimulate investment, encourage research and development, address distortions in the system and close loopholes.

I. **Uncollected tax:** For each of the last two years £2.5bn of tax has remained uncollected and is written off or remitted. There must be strong and effective government support for the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise in their compliance activities. In addition penalties and sanctions against those who practice large scale and repeated fraud of the Exchequer must be made more effective. A change in the balance of risk and reward would also help to eliminate much avoidance.

THE PRIVATISATION EXCESSES

Privatised companies: These have been the floated with a large number of tax breaks. Some have been brought to light, as in the case of the water companies. Others are hidden in the small print of documents kept confidential. There must be an open examination of the tax breaks given to the privatised companies. Where excess profits are made a windfall public dividend should be paid. This should take into account the sale or transfer of National Grid from the Regional Electricity Companies.

Budget

1. **Regional electricity companies windfall bonanza.** The Regional Electricity Companies are seeking to avoid tax on the windfall gain of £3.5bn they are to make when they sale or transfer the national grid later this year. This gain results directly from the valuation placed by the government on the national grid on privatisation of the Regional Electricity Companies. The government cannot allow gains of this magnitude to go free of any public contribution

2. Water companies. Among the biggest tax handouts given on privatisation are those given to the water companies. The conversion of the water authorities into public limited companies meant for the first time they would become subject to taxation. The tax they actually pay will have been reduced by capital allowances (statutory tax relief for the depreciation of certain assets).

The government had the option of whether or not to give water companies capital allowances. In the words of Sir Terence Heiser *"it was a policy judgement to give them the tax allowances"* (evidence to the PAC 2612192).

The water companies were given £7.7 billion of capital allowances to carry forward. these are available to be used to set against profits for tax purposes. (Hansard Written Answer 1/11/89 c234). To date the water companies have made profits of £6.8bn and have paid tax of £420m (Hansard 19/7/94 c92)- an effective tax rate of 6%.

3. British Rail. In preparing for Rail privatisation, the government has made available huge hidden subsidies to companies acquiring privatised British Rail assets. On Government instructions, British Rail accounts were in 1993 revised and restated for the year to 31st March 1992, with the effect of turning a £968 million liability on accelerated capital allowances into a £683 million tax credit - a £1.5 billion turnround, worth potentially £0.5 billion to successor companies.

The full value of capital allowances and future capital allowance claims of several billion pounds was also made available to successor companies in the 1994 Finance Act. These have an estimated cash value in excess of £1 billion.

4. Windfall public dividend. The utilities have made profits of over £40bn since 1989/90 They have been protected from the effects of the recession suffered by the rest of the country The Major Energy Users Council has concluded that the time has come for a one-off windfall levy on the Regional Electricity Companies (FT letters 31/8/94). Such a levy was imposed by the Tories on the banks in 1981.

310/94: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1994

MP NOMINATES TO NHS BOARDS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is nominating individuals to serve on Boards and Trusts within the National Health Service. In September the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority, Sir Donald Wilson, invited local MPs to submit names of people interested in serving on NHS boards as non-executive directors.

"It is as plain as a pikestaff we need people in the new market driven NHS to speak up for the local community and defend the public interest. I have put forward names of responsible local people with a track record and who are deeply interested in our NHS. Recent events at Burnley Health Care Trust show what can happen when things are allowed to go off the rails."

ends

Note to Editors: The Observer (11 September) revealed that Sir Donald is also President of the Chester Conservative Association. At the time the Pendle MP said the Health Service was a Job Centre for the Conservatives.

Background briefing on the new NHS bureaucracy.

At least £1.2 billion has been spent by the Government on introducing its changes to the NHS. A figure of £1.182 billion was given in a Parliamentary Answer in November 1992, and covers the costs up to April 1993. Ministers claim that no updated information has been collected centrally.

The NHS changes have led to the biggest increase in bureaucracy in the history of the Health Service. That increase has been presided over by an unaccountable series of quangos at a national and local level.

Since 1987/88 total annual bureaucratic costs throughout the NHS have risen from £1.44 billion to £3.02 billion, an increase of 110% or £1.58 billion. This represents an increase in the proportion spent on administration, clerical and management costs from 8.7% of the total NHS budget in 1987/88 to 10.8% in 1992-93. The Government's changes have resulted in an 1,800% increase in management costs over just five years with no obvious improvement in patient care.

The increase in managers has been just one part of the growth in bureaucracy in the NHS. Administration has grown throughout the service. From Family Health Service Authorities and GP practices to NHS trusts and

the Department of Health itself, examples flow daily of where the system is being put first.

The opposition to the Government's bureaucratic changes has been widespread. Eric Caines, a former member of the NHS Management Executive said that NHS management was a *"total shambles"* (Independent 30.9.93). Dr Sandy Macara, head of the BMA called the internal market an *"uncontrolled monster" (Guardian* 11.4.91). The leader writer of *The* Times commented that

"the Health Secretary must ensure that the extraordinary increase in the numbers of administrative and clerical staff in the NHS does not continue." (Times 7.4.94).

Despite this opposition from all quarters and the evidence to the contrary Mrs Bottomley still believes that *"NHS trusts are treating more patients to a better standard and are reducing waiting times."* (Hansard 23.3.93). Labour has already shown that such claims are bogus. Virginia Bottomley and her fellow ministers must admit that her bureaucracy is costing more and showing no return for patients.

The growth in management. In England and Wales in 1992 there were 16,700 general and senior managers working in the NHS. There were only 500 managers in 1986 and 4,600 in 1989. In Scotland the number of managers rose to 1,834, an increase of 160% since 1989.

Within Family Health Service Authorities the number of managers increased from 30 in 1989, when there were 90 English Family Practitioner Committees to 640 in 1990 and 1,040 in 1992, when the FPCs became FHSAs. The figure of 30 from the Department of Health may reflect some alternative designations (assuming each FPC had an administrator in charge). But even since 1990, there has been a 62% increase in managers - or an added 400 posts.

The cost. In England the total annual cost of NHS management increased from £25.7 million in 1987 to £498 million in 1992/93. This is a rise of over *1,800%* or £472 million. In Wales the cost rose from £6.5 million to £16.9 million - an increase of 160% - prompting Welsh Secretary John Redwood to start a row with Virginia Bottomley.

A total of £37 million was spent by 143 trusts on logos and image building. Former Health Minister Brian Mawhinney revealed that from October 1993 to March 1994 the NHS Management Executive had spent £619,839 on writing and distributing pamphlets to NHS managers. At the same time, Trust redundancy payments increased 294% in one year. In 1991/92, £96,518,276 was spent.

The perks. According to an Income Data Studies survey in November 1993 the remuneration of Chief Executives has *"escalated rapidly."* In one year the average rise was 8.9%. The largest rise was at Guy's and Lewisham where the chief executive had a 33% pay rise.

Halton Health Authority, in Cheshire, paid £228,000 to re-locate its new District General Manager. The District Auditor has deemed nearly half of these payments to be unlawful. Halton no longer exists but North Cheshire Health Authority is trying to recover some of the money. The National

Audit Office said in September that over £3 million had been wasted in potentially unlawful pay-offs and removal expenses.

The *Sunday Express* revealed that the Department of Health has spent over one million pounds on sending NHS managers on image building courses which the DoH called "executive coaching". The million pounds could have

paid for 70 Kidney dialysis machines or 350 hip replacements. (*Sunday Express* 14.3.93).

Quarry House - the NHS Management Executive headquarters in Leeds - cost £55 million, with a swimming pool, £30,000 gym, and £15,000 hand woven rug. The former Department of Health offices in Elephant and Castle are being kept empty at a cumulative cost of £5 million between 1991-97.

Former health minister Brian Mawhinney told the Commons that the NHS Management Executive has spent £50,000 on dropping the word 'management' from the letterhead of its official stationery. This is part of the development of a new corporate image for the agency. This revelation followed an earlier discovery in December 1993 that the NHS Supplies Authority had spent £200,000 to drop the word "Authority" from its logo.

The amount spent on NHS company cars in 1992/93 rose to £70 million - an increase of 31% on the previous year. The amount spent by Trusts on cars increased by nearly £19 million from £5.3 to £24 million. If one looks at First Wave Trusts alone, the increase amounts to 65%. Ministers claim that this huge increase is cutting down on other travel costs. But the total cost of travel and subsistence in the NHS in 1992/3 was £197,116,000 - an 8.8% rise from the previous year, well above inflation. Travel and subsistence costs in Trusts rose from £17,987,000 in 1991/92 to £55,827,000 in 1992/93 an increase of 210%.

The growth in administration. In 1992 there were 135,000 administrative and clerical staff in the NHS - an increase of 15,000 since 1990. In FHSAs, the number of administrative and clerical staff grew from 4,360 to 5,240 between 1989 and 1992.

There has also been a big increase in administrative staff in GPs' practices - but GPs are still having to devote more time to administration.

According to former health minister Brian Mawhinney the total management, administrative, clerical and reception staff in general practices has risen from 26,578 to 38,118, with the average number of staff per practice increasing from 1.04 to 1.46. However, this has not eased the workload on GPs. A recent Parliamentary Question revealed that the amount of time GPs spent on administration had risen from 1.78 hours in 1985-6 to 2.48 hours a week in 1989/90, and to 3.53 hours a week in November 1992.

The average GP is doing nearly a third more administrative work while the average practice has 40% more managers, administrative staff, secretaries and receptionists since 1989. GP fundholders are costing four times as much as other GPs for health authorities to adminster, according to research in Oxford.

The crisis in the NHS

The Cost. Administration costs in the Department of Health have increased from £162 million to £337 million - a rise of 108% since 1987. The Department of Health spends the equivalent of £579 every day of the year on hospitality. The total figure has risen from £121,579 in 1990/91 to £211,531 in 1992/93 an increase of 74%.

The Government has given NHS trusts £98 million to help them set up business in the internal market. In 1991 first wave trusts were given £190,000 each towards start up costs. The fourth wave Trusts were given £254,000 each - 35% more than the First Wave Trusts. Administration costs in Family Health Service Authorities have increased by 143% since 1989-90 to £161.9 million in 1992/93. In South East Thames alone, the increase has been 403%. In the Hospital and Community sector administrative and clerical salaries have risen from £815.3 million to £1,505 million between 1987 and 1992/93 - an increase of over 84% .

What about the Patients? Whilst the number and cost of managers has increased - there has been no benefit for patients. Indeed, patient care has deteriorated on several indicators. Waiting lists are at record levels - 1.07 *million* is the official Government figure. But the Government looks at the numbers of people waiting over a year as a test of the success of their changes. There has been an increase in every quarter since March 1993, totalling over 30% in the numbers waiting over a year.

There are also hidden waiting lists - people waiting to see a consultant for the first time - which show that over two million people are waiting, some as long as 182 weeks. When Virginia Bottomley was panicked into making new announcements about the Patients Charter in April 1994, she conceded that there was a hidden waiting list. In 1993 the NHS lost 10,637 beds. Since 1981, 120,637 NHS beds have gone.

Patients' Charter. Over nine million patients a year are not being seen within the times laid down by the Patients Charter. 17% of patients are not being seen within 30 minutes of their appointment and one in five are not being assessed immediately on arrival in casualty.

Increased Charges. Prescription charges have risen 2,275% since 1979 the latest increase from £4.25 to £4.75 is the sixteenth since the Tories came to power. A rise to at least £5.00 is expected in this year's budget. The Government is now proposing to increase the proportion which patients pay of dental charges from 80 to 100% as part of its Green Paper dental health. This comes at a time when NHS dentistry is being completely undermined and many patients are forced to go private.

Fewer nurses. Whilst the number of managers continues to rise, the number of nurses continues to fall. In 1989 there were 405,300 nurses and midwives in England and Wales. By 1992 this number had fallen by 23,300 to only 382,000 - a drop of 5.7% Between 1991 and 1992 alone, the number fell by 14,100. **Complaints.** Between 1991 and 1993 official patient complaints rose by 57% to 58,000.

311/94: For Immediate Release: 24 November 1994

HEALTH CHIEF QUITS

James Rawson, the Chairman of the crisis wracked Burnley Health Care NHS Trust, has resigned according to a statement today from the North Western Regional Health Authority.

Gordon Prentice MP - whose Pendle constituency is covered by the Trust - said today: "I called for Mr Rawson's resignation on 7 November and he has finally done the right thing in going. However, there are still too many unanswered questions for this action in itself to be seen as the end of the matter. It is the end of a chapter, not, unfortunately, the end of the story."

My colleagues in Burnley and Rossendale joined me three weeks ago in calling for an independent inquiry into the affairs and management of the Trust. That is still required. We need to know how the Trust ever got into this sorry state of affairs and we need to find out what happened to very large sums of public money."

Note to Editors: Burnley MP, Peter Pike, has an adjournment debate on the troubled Trust on Monday 28 November. The following Early Day Motion appeared in the Commons Order Paper on 2 November in the names of Peter Pike MP (Burnley), Gordon Prentice MP (Pendle) and Janet Anderson MP (Rossendale):

"That this House believes that there should be an urgent and independent inquiry into the affairs and management of Burnley Health Care Trust; notes that in September Mr Ian Mahady, a gynaecologist and clinical director, was sacked at 3 hour's notice and offered a cash payment of £100,000 and that despite this being done at the time with the alleged agreement of the Trust Chief Executive, Mrs M. Aikman and Trust Chairman, Mr James Rawson, and with the backing of the Trust Board, on Monday 24 October Mr Rawson asked Mrs Aikman to resign; notes that on Tuesday 25 October Mrs Aikman called on Mr Rawson to resign and said that she was being made the scapegoat; notes that on Friday 28 October she resigned with a cash settlement understood to be in excess of £250,000 and with a clause preventing her from making any comment, notes that on Monday 31 October the Medical Advisory Council of the Trust called for the resignation of the Medical Director, Dr Sam Pickens, who is understood to be willing to go on payment of £1 million; and believes the Trust clearly no longer has the confidence of the people of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale who see management wrangles and misuse of funds for cash pay-outs to resolve these problems rather than for medical treatment for people within the Trust area." **Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)**

312/94: For Immediate Release: 24 November 1994

RAILTRACK SELL OFF "A BLOW TO EAST LANCS" says PENDLE MP

Today's announcement by the Transport Secretary, Dr Brian Mawhinney, that Railtrack is to be privatised was immediately condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "Railtrack - with assets worth £6.5 billion - is being sold off to finance a pre-General Election cut in the standard rate of income tax. The Chancellor has already admitted the cash is needed to make his sums add up."

"We shall all be the losers as railway land across the nation is sold off at knock down prices."

"But what is going to happen in North East Lancashire. Is money going to be spent on our crumbling railway infrastructure? I doubt it. What about maintaining, for example, the viaduct at Colne? What about the investment that is so badly needed to encourage people back on to the railways?"

"We shall have to fight like tigers to keep our local rail network intact" said the MP.

313/94: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1994

MP GOES FOR STATUS QUO ON COUNCIL REVIEW

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will not be calling on Environment Secretary, John Gummer, to refer back to the Local Government Commission its recommendation on the structure of local government in Lancashire. After further consultation with the public the Commission abandoned its earlier proposal for a new unitary authority bolting together Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale in favour of sticking with the status quo.

The MP said: "The whole exercise has been a complete farce and a waste of money. My preferred option - for a unitary Pendle - never got off the starting blocks and the Commission pushed for a new Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale authority which, I have to say, received a lukewarm welcome."

"In the circumstances, I think it is better to stay with what we have and try to learn some lessons from the exercise. The Commission wants work to be done on improving communications between districts and the county, cutting out the overlap and improving co-ordination. I entirely agree with that. We need more transparency and accountability in local government - not less."

314/94: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1994

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR POST OFFICE SELL OFF "CLOSE TO ZERO" says MP

Only a tiny fraction of the responses to the Government's public consultation paper on the future of the Post Office were in favour of full or partial privatisation according to a Parliamentary answer from Industry Minister, Tim Eggar.

He told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that only 60 responses out of 15,400 received were "positively in favour" of privatising the Post Office.

Prentice said: "The 60 responses amounts to less that half of one per cent - 0.4% - of those who responded to the consultation and confirms what I already knew from my postbag."

"Post Office privatisation was immensely unpopular. There was no demand for it amongst the general public and there was no mandate for it as the proposal did not even appear in the Conservatives 1992 General Election manifesto."

"What we cannot allow the Government to do is allow the Post Office to twist in the wind - denying it the commercial freedom in wants and needs. That

would be an act of spite of which this Government is, unfortunately, all too capable."

Note to Editors: The Green Paper on the Future of the Post Office invited comments from the public by 30 September. The privatisation proposals were abandoned ahead of the Queen's Speech when the Government failed to win sufficient Tory backbench support for the plan.

315/94: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1994

CRISIS IN BURNLEY NHS TRUST REACHES THE COMMONS

The crisis in the trouble torn and leaderless Burnley Health Care NHS Trust reaches the Commons tonight when Burnley MP, Peter Pike, will raise the issue in an adjournment debate. The Trust currently has no Chief Executive or Chairman following the resignations of Maggie Aikman and (on Thursday 24 November) James Rawson. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency is covered by the Trust, will also be in the Chamber. The late night debate immediately follows the controversial one on Euro funding which the Prime Minister has made into a matter of confidence.

Prentice said: "There are still far too many unanswered questions. Why did Maggie Aikman resign? We still do not know. When I asked the Secretary of State last week she told me in a written reply to my Parliamentary question that she didn't know either! We need to get to the bottom of the pay-offs. Who got what and why? There are issues concerning the responsibility of the Trust board for what has been happening. We need assurances from Ministers that there will be a more open and consultative style of management with less macho posturing and confrontation. Above all we need an independent inquiry to find out what happened. No-ne wants to unnecessarily rake over the coals but we need to find out what went wrong so lessons can be learned for the future."

Note to Editors: The following letter was sent to the Pendle MP by Health Minister, Tom Sackville, on 22 November.

> "Thank you for your letters of 29 and 31 October to Virginia Bottomley supporting recent calls by Peter Pike for an independent inquiry into the management at Burnley Health Care NHS Trust and asking about the terms and conditions of Mrs Maggie Aikman's settlement on resigning from her position as Chief Executive. I can appreciate your concern.
>
> "Burnley Health care NHS Trust, like any other NHS Trust, is an autonomous employing authority with full responsibility for the local recruitment, retention and dismissal of NHS staff. NHS Trusts are empowered to make payments in connection with the termination of the employment of their staff. The responsibility for

> any settlement lies ultimately with the Trust Chairman who is personally accountable for the termination payment to the Chief Executive. Guidance on systems and principles for handling severance

payments has been issued to Trusts and includes the advice that arrangements, which they may consider necessary to protect confidentiality, should not be framed so as to prevent proper public scrutiny. The NHS Executive is seeking assurances from the Chairman of Burnley Health Care NHS Trust that the payment on termination of the contract of the former Chief Executive was made with regard to probity and value for money, applying the guidance and the principles of public accountability."

"Although the Trust is responsible for managing its own affairs, Ministers have been closely watching the situation over the past few weeks to ensure that patient care was not compromised."

"Since your letters, I understand that doctors and management at the Trust have resolved their differences and are working closely together to bring management stability to local healthcare. I am confident that the Trust will now quickly put the recent difficulties behind it and continue to provide services of which the local community can be proud."

316/94: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1994

PENDLE MP RESELECTED

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been reselected by the Pendle Constituency Labour Party. The result of the reselection procedure was announced on Friday of last week at a meeting in Nelson of the Party's General Committee.

Under the Labour Party's rules, a mandatory "one member one vote" ballot is not required if a person wins more than two thirds of nominations from local Party branches. Other organisations such as the affiliated trade unions can also nominate and the successful candidate must again get two thirds or more of the combined total of nominations from branches and affiliates.

The MP said: "I am obviously delighted to have been reselected by my local constituency Party. I consider it a great privilege to represent the people of Pendle in Parliament."

317/94: For Immediate Release: 29 November 1994

MINISTER REFUSES INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO BURNLEY NHS TRUST

Health Minister, Tom Sackville, told Burnley MP, Peter Pike, last night that there would not be an independent inquiry into recent events at Burnley Health care NHS Trust. He told the Burnley MP -whose adjournment debate threw up a host of still unanswered questions - that such an inquiry would not *"achieve anything now".*

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency is also in the Trust's area, said afterwards the Minister's decision was inappropriate in the circumstances. "I told the House that no-one wants to rake over the coals but we need an independent inquiry to ensure that lessons are learnt. I posed a whole series of questions last night and didn't get answers. I do not want to fan the flames but

I believe the local community deserves an answer to the questions that have been raised by the local health watchdog, the Community Health Council, by those working in the Trust and by the local press. I intend to get those answers."

"The Minister has now appointed a new Chairman, Dr Archer, who has the difficult task of rebuilding confidence and trust in the organisation. I hope to meet him soon."

318/94: For Immediate Release: 29 November 1994

BUDGET STICKS WITH VAT INCREASE

Today's Budget is full of elaborate window dressing according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the Chancellor's rhetoric cannot disguise tax hikes amounting to 7p on the basic rate of income tax for a married couple on average earnings with a £30,000 mortgage.

The Pendle MP said the Opposition would table an amendment on the VAT increase to "flush out the Conservative faint hearts". People are outraged that nothing is done about the boss of British Gas getting a 75% pay hike bringing his salary to £475,000 while the Government presses ahead with the VAT increase on fuel."

"What has been offered to the long term unemployed is too little too late. The measures are coming from a Government which notoriously believes *"unemployment is a price worth paying..."*

"The tax rises have come about because of mismanagement of the economy. No-one knew about the £50 billion budget deficit until after the General Election in April 1992. And the economy didn't even begin to respond to treatment until we were forced out of the straightjacket of the ERM in September 1992."

The MP said: "If the British economy had grown at only the average rate of the world's most powerful economies (the Group of Seven) over the past 15 years it would now be 10% bigger in real terms than it is now. This year, 10% of GDP is about £66 billion yielding at today's tax rates at least £25 billion more in revenue for the Government. That is money that could have been used to finance better health, education and other services. Just think of the difference that kind of money could make."

319/94: For Immediate Release: 5 December 1994

KEY VOTE LOOMS ON VAT ON FUEL

Tomorrow's key vote on VAT on fuel is too close to call according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster ahead of the crucial vote, the MP said the decision of the Ulster Unionists not to back the Government *"had changed the arithmetic".*

The MP continued: "Every Conservative MP who votes against this increase will be saving every pensioner in the land a small fortune. The figures calculated

by Age Concern show the heavy burden the elderly are being expected to carry."

"The Government is determined to press ahead with VAT on fuel costing a typical family £80 a year. The full range of tax increases will cost a typical family over £360 in the year ahead. The Budget confirmed the largest tax increases ever on the British public with a typical family paying an extra £850 over the period 1993-95. The tax burden on the typical family is at its highest level since 1979, an effective tax rate of 36.1% on gross earnings."

Note to Editors: Age Concern writes: "(We are) disappointed that the Government hopes to raise VAT on fuel to 17. 5%. We remain opposed to this decision and concerned about the effect it may have on many pensioners. The compensation package announced in the budget is only a reconfirmation of that announced in November 1993. No additional help has been announced.

Following the budget speech, many single pensioners will be expecting an extra 50p per week in compensation for the increase in VAT, but they will be disappointed. They will only get an extra 30p - the other 20p has been included in the annual uprating. We welcome the Government's intention to explain the compensation by a special notice in pensioner's order books, but we believe that many pensioners will still remain confused.

The compensation package will not meet the costs of the additional average fuel bill for pensioner households. Single pensioners and pensioner couples mainly dependent on state pensions will be 56p per week short of the extra expenditure incurred from the VAT increase. The attached tables explain this in detail.

The compensation also takes no account of regional variations in heating costs which can vary substantially. For example, it costs 41% more to heat a typical semi-detached house in Aberdeen than in Bristol.

Pensioners who do not have a full contribution record will not receive the full amount of extra help. Age Concern believes there should be no reduction in compensation for incomplete contribution records. Age Concern welcomes the increase in the age related income tax allowances announced in the budget and the £10 million extension to the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. We also welcome the increase in cold weather payments to £8.50 but we maintain that older people should receive a regular payment to help meet winter fuel bills.

Average fuel bill for single pensioners *mainly dependent* on state benefits

Average fuel bill	VAT at 17.5%	Compensation	Net Loss
£465 pa	£81 pa	£52 pa	- £29 pa
£8.94pw	£1.56 pw	£1.00 pw	- £0.56 pw

Data in all tables from Family Expenditure Survey 1993

Average fuel bill for *all* single pensioners

Fuel Bill	VAT at 17.5%	Compensation	Net loss
£504 pa	£88 pa	£52 pa	- £36 pa
£9.69 pw	£1.69 pw	£1.00 pw	- £0.69 pw

Maximum fuel bill covered by compensation 1995/96 for single pensioners

Compensation	Maximum fuel bill	VAT at 17.5%
£52 pa	£300pa	£52 pa
£1 pw	£5 .71 pw	£1.00 pw

Fuel bills above £300 pa or £5.71 pw (including standing charges of approximately £ 80 pa) will not be covered by the compensation.

Average fuel bills for pensioner couples *mainly dependent* **on state benefits**

Fuel bill	VAT at 17.5%	Compensation	Net Loss
£584 pa	£102 pa	£73 pa	- £29 pa
£11.24 pw	£1.96 pw	£1.40 pw	- £0.56 pw

Average fuel bill for *all* pensioner couples

Fuel bill	VAT at 17.5%	Compensation	Net Loss
£659 pa	£115 pa	£73 pa	- £42 pa
£12.67 pw	£2.21 pw	£1.40 pw	- £0.81 pw

Maximum fuel bill covered by the compensation 1995/96 for pensioner couples

Compensation	Maximum fuel bill	VAT at 17.5%
£73 pa	£417 pa	£73 pa
£1.40 pw	£8.02 pw	£1.40 pw

Fuel bills above £417 pa or £8.02 pw (including standing charges of approximately £80 pa) will not be covered by the compensation.

320/94: For Immediate Release: 5 December 1994

MP TACKLES PM ON BOARDROOM PAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is keeping up the pressure to cap big increases in boardroom pay. He has written to the Prime Minister seeking clarification on today's report in the Guardian that a new Cabinet Committee has been set up *"to examine ways of handing shareholders new powers to curb greedy directors".*

The MP commented: "If this press report is true, then we have witnessed an amazingly speedy change of heart by the Prime Minister who told me on Thursday of last week that, essentially, the matter of boardroom pay was something best left to shareholders. I want to know when this Committee was set up, its membership and when we can expect it to reach conclusions."

Note to Editors: The letter from the Pendle MP reads:
Dear Prime Minister, On 28 November 1994 I asked you what steps you were taking, other than exhortation, to make it easier for shareholders to influence the size of the salaries and perks of those at the top of British industry. You replied on Thursday 1 December saying *"shareholders already have the ability to exercise influence. For example, by raising questions at the Annual*

Meeting or, in the case of institutional holdings, by exerting pressure behind the scenes."

Not unreasonably, I took it from that reply that you were content to leave things to the shareholders themselves. I was, therefore, surprised to read the report in today's Guardian which tells us all that you have reportedly formed a Cabinet Committee precisely to look into these matters. Can I ask if the Press report is correct? If so, can I also ask when you decided to form this Committee and when it was formally brought into being? And can I also have details of its membership and terms of reference and when it is due to report?

321/94: For Immediate Release: 6 December 1994

PENDLE MP OPENS FILE ON "MAJOR BLOOMERS"

Getting factually correct answers from the Prime Minister at question time in the House of Commons is an uphill struggle says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP is so exasperated he is opening a file to publicise "Major Bloomers".

"Last Thursday, the Prime Minister yet again misled the House - this time in a reply to Sir David Steel MP about the living standards of the poor. The Prime Minister was asked for his reaction to the fact that the richest half per cent of taxpayers had enjoyed tax cuts during the 1980s averaging £47,000 a year each while the lowest paid had experienced recent tax increases of £400 a year. The Prime Minister claimed *"that real disposable net incomes, at all levels, have risen."* This is not true.

"I see the Low Pay Unit is now calling on the Prime Minister to correct this misleading statement and I, too, am seeking clarification from him. He is always doing this and it is absolutely infuriating because, under Commons procedures, he always has the last word. He asserts one thing to be a cast iron fact and, as often as not, he has just plucked his response out of the air."

Note to Editors: The Low Pay Unit quotes Department of Social Security figures which show that:

• the poorest tenth of households saw their real net income fall by 17 per cent (after housing costs) between 1979 and 1991/92;

• this compares with an increase of 36 per cent in average living standards over the same period, and with a 62 per cent increase in the real net incomes of the richest tenth (DSS, *Households Below Average Income: a statistical analysis, 1979 -1991/2,* HMSO,July1994).

This increasing spread of incomes helps to explain why the numbers in poverty (having an income of less than half the national average) have increased **from 5 million in 1979 to 13.9 million in April 1992.**

322/94: For Immediate Release: 6 December 1994

HEALTH MINISTER RULES OUT INQUIRY AT BURNLEY NHS TRUST

Health Minister, Tom Sackville, again ruled out an independent inquiry into recent events at Burnley Health care NHS Trust. During Health Questions in the Commons today, the Minister was pressed to concede an inquiry by local MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency is in the area covered by the troubled Trust.

The MP said afterwards: “Everyone in my area wants an independent inquiry and I was dismayed by the Minister’s refusal to budge. We still do not know why the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Trust resigned nor do we know how the £250,000 pay-off to the former Chief Executive was calculated.”

“Ministers say what happened at Burnley was a one-off but it is part of a deeper malaise. We all recall the furore caused by the Homewood Trust Chairman, Roy Lilley, who said that doctors’ first duty is to the organisations that employ them - not the patients.”

“The real issues concern openness and accountability. The macho management style and unwillingness to listen are not particular to Burnley Health Care NHS Trust but are systemic. They are characteristics of the new market led NHS that has been created.”

Note to Editors: With "liberalisation" of the NHS and devolution of administrative power to Trusts, Government has lost both control and accountability for the management of health care services. This loss of control threatens: 1. The quality of health care services provided to the public. 2. The integrity of the management of public funds. Public money should be spent to provide better health care, not protect the Trust's mismanagement. The Burnley fiasco was triggered when in mid-September 1994 a consultant gynaecologist (Mr Mahady) had been declared redundant and ordered to clear his desk within 3 hours. Public outcry over this incident prompted the Trust to appoint 2 consultants to look into the matter (no findings to date). Trust Chairman (Mr Rawson) and the Chief Executive (Mrs Aitken) have subsequently resigned within a month of calling for each other's resignation. In addition, Medical Director (Mr Pickens) was pushed out, as was the first new Acting Chief Executive (Mr Meskin) who was replaced by a Mr Chew.

323/94: For Immediate Release: 7 December 1994

PENDLE LOSES OUT IN BID FOR CASH

A bid by Pendle Council for cash from the Government’s “Single Regeneration Budget” for 1995/6 has failed. The money was earmarked for bids covering a range of objectives - from employment to crime prevention and projects specifically directed to ethnic minority communities - which the Government unveiled last April. 469 bids were submitted in England and 200 were successful.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “I am bitterly disappointed that we failed to get the cash the area so desperately needs. I know that a lot of people - inside and outside the Council - put in a lot of work and will share my disappointment.”

“It is not entirely clear how the Government selects the successful bidders but the Index of Deprivation - based on the 1991 census - plays a key part. This

measures deprivation in three ways. The first looks at the council area as a whole. On this measure, of the 21 successful bids in the North West, the Pendle area ranks 10th in deprivation. Over the entire country, Manchester, for example, is the 13th most deprived area and Pendle 103rd. The second looks at the proportion of census enumeration districts in the council area falling within the most deprived 7% in the country. Here Pendle ranks 13th out of the 21 bids. The third looks at the deprivation in the three most deprived wards in each council area and here we rank 10th out of 21."

"By any measure, Pendle has pockets of real deprivation and it is an absolute tragedy the area is not getting some of this extra cash."

Note to Editors: Successful SRB Bids in the North West (This information is from the Department of the Environment)

A Bid for the Renaissance of Whitehaven Programme to complete the economic regeneration of Whitehaven's harbour area and town centre and reposition the local economy into the tourism and service sectors. Managed by experienced development agency established with strong support from BNFL, local authorities, and English Partnerships, drawing in a range of private investment, main programmes and European funding. *(£1,240k year 1, £4,036k total)*

All Change at Crewe Project to revitalize the economy of a town dominated by a small number of large manufacturing companies. A widely based partnership led by the TEC which aims to stimulate the enterprise culture through stronger business links with education and external business support. *(£350k year 1, £480k total)*

Blackburn Proposal drawing on successful City Challenge experience. Good partnership and delivery arrangements for strategy centred on development of three large sites adjacent to M65 extension. Strong linkages into training, business development, and community support. (*£1,450k year 1, £19,500k total)*

Canalside Rochdale Proposal for the regeneration of the neglected Canalside area adjacent to the town centre. Strong partnership with TEC and local authority very active in preparing linked programmes for property development for industry, business development and training. Will capitalise on and complement very substantial commercial investment underway in immediately adjacent areas. *(£1,490k year 1, £10,472k total)*

Carlisle, Raffles Sets the Pace Bid focused on Raffles Estate, where successful Estate Action is nearing completion. Wide ranging partnership with strong community commitment is seeking to complete training, education, and crime prevention measures to complement and protect the substantial public investment in housing stock.
(£728k year 1, £1, 631k total)

Congleton Town and Industry Initiative A comprehensive approach to regenerating the centre of a small town suffering a number of problems. Decline is intended to be arrested by a programme of short, mainly capital, projects combining business infrastructure, housing, and support to young people. An emerging partnership which is seeking to maximise the impact of existing main programmes and with excellent projected private sector

leverage. SRB pump primes an initiative which becomes self sustaining after Year 2. *(£390k year 1, £785k total)*

Eden (Appleby Training Centre) Project to create a heritage training skills centre and information technology business suite in a disused historic railway building. Will support economic diversification in a rural area and exploit the tourist potential of the successful Settle-Carlisle railway. SRB will complement funding package involving European, TEC and business sponsorship managed by new company to be formed by bidding partners. *(£155k year 1, £573k total)*

Ellesmere Port Bid focuses on 7 adjacent wards in the town of Ellesmere Port suffering from industrial change and other problems. Strategy is to bring about through a series of coordinated measures, improvements in economic prosperity, competitiveness, living and environmental conditions and social development. *(£695k year 1, £3, 181k total)*

Initiative Burnley Regeneration strategy which successfully links two multiply deprived areas with three areas of industrial/commercial potential. Strong private sector support and investment potential with community actively engaged. TEC and Local Authority working closely and effectively to build sensibly on previous investment through Urban Programme and Estate Action.*(£1,500k year 1, £19,500k total)*

Manchester Developed from Manchester City Council's six separate bids, set within the City Pride context, into a smaller but integrated and coherent package which will improve economic performance, support enterprise, and remove barriers to employment. It has two priority areas (Greater Monsall and Moss Side) to link with existing investment in their physical regeneration. The Moss Side proposal also links to the successful bid from adjacent Old Trafford. *(£1,752m year 1, £13,688m total)*

Manufacturing Partnership Comprehensive strategy to build the competitiveness of manufacturing industry throughout Lancashire. Range of measures include business start up and growth, consultancy, training and managed work space. Unique partnership involving two TECs and Lancashire Enterprises with strong private sector input and proven organisations. *(£1,167k year 1, £8,651k total)*

Miles Platting and Ancoats Young People Initiative Small programme of projects in Miles Platting area of Manchester linked to City Council Monsall proposals and within City Pride umbrella but run by voluntary sector. Focus on training and employment, youth work, and drug education. Complements physical improvements in regional centre and recent City Grant for major mill refurbishment within area.
(£106k year 1, £178k total)

Morecambe Strategy to halt decline and build tourism through comprehensive regeneration of area of need in the town centre. Will build on existing housing schemes and extend to business, training, and environmental schemes. *(£426k year 1, £4,272k total)*

Old Trafford Modified bid for Old Trafford area, included within City Pride and closely linked to Moss Side and Hulme. Smaller bid supported focuses on

raising youth aspirations and prospects, crime prevention and drugs problem, alongside enterprise encouragement and business support.
(£343k year 1, £2,591k total)

Oldham - Westwood Joint local authority and TEC led bid aimed at improving skills and housing with a strong educational and community focus. Will complement and capitalise on commercial development in adjacent areas.
(£640k year 1, £1 1,086k total)

Regeneration in West Chester A plan to reap the benefits of existing Estate Action funding in an area of deprivation in an otherwise prosperous location, using a strong local partnership. Private sector involvement and good links to mainstream housing, TEC, European, and Housing Corporation funding. A coordinated package of targeted initiatives including training, employment and education with community commitment. *£559k year 1, £2,073k year 1)*

St Vincents Housing Association (Manchester) Project to tackle Manchester's well documented problem of homelessness and jobless young people by providing combined accommodation, training, and job search near City Centre in Development Corporation area. Strategy in place for long term funding and move-on accommodation. SRB contribution will lever in Housing Corporation and European funds. Architectural competition for new building in historically important Castlefield area. *(£226k year 1, £348k total)*

Tame Valley Initiative Strategy to transform the economic and social basis of the industrial spine of Tameside from newly established partnership including local authority, TEC, private sector, and educational establishments. Focus on small and medium sized enterprises to raise competitiveness; and on raising community involvement particularly among ethnic minorities. Builds on existing initiatives, including Renewal Area. *(£957k year 1, £8,001k total)*

The Regeneration of Central Accrington Bid to arrest decline of town centre plagued by declining economic base and rising crime. Comprehensive package including flagship major mill refurbishment to provide employment and training, linked to comprehensive community safety measures. Excellent proposals for partnership arrangements with good linkages to existing proposals and private investment. *(£l.,093k year 1, £3,812k total)*

The Salford Partnership A clear strategy within City Pride context combining city-wide programmes (economic development, removing barriers to employment, community safety, and crime reduction) with concentration on physical development in limited areas of need.
(£2,000k year 1, £16,720k total)

Wigan plc Regeneration strategy for the regeneration of former coalfield area with special emphasis on recent colliery closure district. Vision for improving competitiveness and reversing decline. Partnership with City Challenge experience. Private and community sectors well entrenched in bid proposals. Comprehensive funding package drawing in variety of national and European programmes. *(£ 1, OOOk year 1, £1 1, 71 5k total)*

324/94: For Immediate Release: 12 December 1994

PENDLE MP SLAMS “SPANISH PRACTICES OF” DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, launched a blistering attack on David Hunt MP, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, over the way in which thousands of pounds - taken by the Duchy from people in the area who die intestate - are distributed every year to individuals and organisations in the old County Palatine (the pre- local government reorganisation boundaries of Lancashire).

The MP says only £714 in total was donated by the Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund last year to three disabled people in Pendle. He told the Commons today that responsibility for administering the fund should be shifted from a shadowy, unelected little group advising the Chancellor of the Duchy to the democratically accountable Lancashire County Council.

The MP said afterwards: “The Duchy of Lancaster is a relic from a bygone age - and like most relics throws up curious facts. I asked the Chancellor of the Duchy today to explain why one school - and one school alone out of 710 in the whole of Lancashire (and more still if schools up to the boundaries of the old County Palatine are included) - should get money every year.”

In 1993, £8,683 was paid over to the Royal Grammar School in Lancaster for bursaries along with £5,000 for new buildings. In 1992, the school received £6,417 for bursaries. In 1991, £5,782 for bursaries and £5,000 for new buildings. In 1990, £5,243 for bursaries and another £5,000 for new buildings. In 1989, £3,206 for bursaries. No other school gets a look in.”

“Unless the criteria for distributing the money are made crystal clear people will suspect its the old boy network at work. I am encouraging all schools in my constituency to write to the Chancellor of the Duchy to make a claim on the hoard of cash.”

325/94: For Immediate Release: 12 December 1994

ROW FLARES OVER LIBERAL *"WASTE OF TIME"* JIBE AT MP

The row over the failed bid by Pendle Council for cash from the Government's "Single Regeneration Budget" (SRB) shows no sign of dying down. Last week, veteran Liberal Councillor, Tony Greaves, said local MP, Gordon Prentice, was a *"waste of time"*, accusing him of sitting on his hands when he could have lobbied Ministers.

The SRB offers help to deprived areas of the country - but Councils must put forward schemes and bid against each other for the cash available.

The MP said: "The Liberal controlled Council never involved me at any stage. Councillor Greaves did not approach me and neither did the Liberal Leader of the Council, Alan Davies. I was never consulted about the shape of the bid. I took the view that the Liberal Democrats had taken a conscious decision not to involve me, a Labour MP, imagining it might be counter-productive. Perhaps they thought they would get the kudos following a successful bid. I don't know."

"It is a tragedy Pendle's bid failed. But for those whose responsibility it was to frame and submit the bid - without involving me at any stage - now to turn

round and seek to pin the blame on me for its failure is, I think, a bit wide of the mark."

"I take full responsibility for my own actions. However, I think it is trespassing too much on my goodwill to expect me also to take responsibility for the failures of the Liberal Democrat Council - or some of its more hysterical councillors."

326/94: Tony Greaves

For Publication

Mr Roy Prenton
Editor, Nelson Leader
Scotland Road
Nelson BB9

12 December 1994

Dear Mr Prenton

Liberal Councillor, Tony Greaves, alleges that I am a *"waste of time"* as Pendle's MP because the Council failed to get any money from the Government's Single Regeneration Budget which allocates additional cash to deprived areas across the country.

To get this help, Councils have to submit a bid. As always, I stand ready to help the Liberal controlled Council in their efforts to improve the lot of the area but, unfortunately, my help was never sought.

Councillor Greaves questions whether I "batted for Pendle" and yet at no stage did he or the Liberal Leader of the Council, Alan Davies, or the Council itself, ask me to lend my weight to the bid. Indeed, at no stage was I ever consulted on the shape of Pendle Council's bid. I would certainly have lobbied Government Ministers had I been asked to do so.

I share everyone's disappointment that we were unsuccessful this time. As I said last week, the 1991 census highlights pockets of real deprivation in Pendle and we need to fight hard to ensure that we get all the cash that is available. I hope the Liberal controlled Council will involve me in next year's bid, as it chose not to this year.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Prentice MP

327/94: For Immediate Release: 12 December 1994

GOVERNMENT IN DISARRAY AFTER VAT ON FUEL DEFEAT

The Conservatives have suffered their worst Budget defeat in thirty years. Last week's vote on VAT on fuel was a triumph for common sense and a disaster for the Government according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Prentice said: "VAT on fuel was unfair. It hits the poorest people, especially the pensioners, hardest. Families on £105 a week spend a seventh of their incomes on fuel. Families on £800 a week spend only a fiftieth. The compensation payments for the elderly and those on the lowest incomes were derisory."

"The Conservative record on VAT should make them curl up in embarrassment. They introduced VAT in 1973 when they said they wouldn't. They doubled VAT in 1979 when they said they wouldn't. They have widened the scope of VAT 14 times since 1979. And, of course, they extended VAT to domestic fuel (the 8% increase they forced through earlier) when they said they wouldn't."

"Last week's vote was important for the pensioners and others struggling to pay their fuel bills. But it also marked an important watershed in the life of this Government. At last, after 15 years, the Tory monolith has cracked."

328/94: For Immediate Release: 12 December 1994

DANGEROUS TOYS FLOODING IN says PENDLE MP

The British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA) and Labour MPs are warning parents about dangerous Xmas toys, following tests carried out by a leading UK toy safety laboratory in SGS Test House (Mr Malcolm Franks 081 998 2171). Many imported toys fail to meet rigourous UK safety standards, with potentially lethal consequences.

The Director General of the BTHA David Hawtin says: "A large number of toys are still being seized by Trading Standards Officers, which could cause harm to young children. We've seen a spinning bird toy from Strathclyde that has a 2 inch metal spike in it. Many imported counterfeit toys haven't been produced to the highest safety standard. Our 'Lion Mark' is a guarantee of quality and safety."

Vice-chair of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration & Chief Trading Standards Officer with Haringey, Tony Northcott (081 800 6699) joined with Lothian Trading Standards Chief Mike Drewry (031 469 5454) in saying: "The public are at risk, especially from car boot sales, street sales from suitcases and unlicensed street traders. People cannot be too careful when they shop for Christmas toys."

Gordon Prentice MP says: "Dangerous toys are still reaching the public. Some dangerous toys even have the EU-standard "CE" mark. One toy we've given the lab has a dangerous two inch spike. Others have high levels of lead paint. My advice to the public is buy from reputable retailers. Don't take any chances with potentially lethal toys this Christmas."

Mr Ray Dorrity, 'Power Rangers' Operations Manager at Bandai UK said "Copies of our best-selling toys are flooding in from China and simply do not meet our safety standards."

329/94: For Immediate Release: 14 December 1994

SHARP FALL IN PENDLE JOBLESS

Unemployment in Pendle last month fell sharply to a level last seen in February 1991. 2,309 people (6.1%) were out of work and claiming benefit. Of these 1,798 are man (8.3%) and 511 women (3.2%). Vacancies are slightly down at both Nelson and Colne Job Centres.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Everyone must be relieved, as I am, that unemployment has fallen so dramatically. It is 600 more than the figure John Major inherited from Margaret Thatcher in November 1990 yet this seems a triumph when compared with the very high levels we have seen throughout his premiership."

"This fall in unemployment has not come about without cost. The nature of employment has changed. There are more part time jobs and fewer full time jobs. Pay and conditions have deteriorated. The Wages Councils - protecting those on the lowest pay - have been abolished. And new tighter controls are promised for the unemployed. The Bill bringing in the Jobseeker's Allowance is about to be introduced to Parliament. Under its draconian proposals - revealed in a document leaked to the press today - jobseekers could lose all claim to benefits if, for example, they left a job voluntarily or *without good cause*."

ends

Note to Editors The Jobseeker's Allowance (JS) is a new benefit for unemployed people which will come into operation in April 1996. The new benefit will replace and combine Unemployment Benefit (UB) and Income Support (IS). Under the proposed Jobseeker's legislation, fewer people will qualify for benefits and many of those who do qualify will be paid less. Unemployed claimants will face a tougher test of active work-seeking and many more will be subject to disqualification and benefit penalties.

1. HOW WILL JSA WORK?

To be eligible for JSA unemployed people will need to:
• satisfy the labour market conditions •be out of work or working less than 16 hours a week •have an adequate National Insurance (NI) contributions record (for contributory JSA) •have income and capital below defined levels (for means tested JSA) •be aged 18 or over (except in special circumstances) and under state pension age

Eligibility for contributory JSA will be available to claimants who satisfy the contribution test which will remain unchanged. People who are currently entitled to 12 months of UB on the basis of their NI record will in the future only be eligible for 6 months of contributory JSA. Although the White Paper defends the continuance of the contributory principle for JSA, it fails to explain why it is being halved to six months and limited to a personal allowance.

2. WHAT WILL JSA BE WORTH?

The structure of JSA The main difference between UB and contributory JSA are that the latter will only last for 6 months, will be aligned to IS rates, and will not have an allowance for dependants. Thus. after 6 months on contributory JSA, claimants will undergo a means-test for income-related JSA

and more families with an unemployed partner will be moved onto means-tested benefits immediately.

The means-test for income-related JSA will be completed by claimants with an inadequate NI contribution record and by those whose entitlement to contributory JSA has run out. The test will be similar to the test currently imposed upon IS claimants:

•there will be no entitlement if the person has capital (savings, redundancy payments, etc.) of more than £8,000

•capital between £3,000 and £8,000 will generate cuts to benefit of £l per week for each £250 or part of £250 over £3,000

Like IS, income-related JSA will consist of three components:

•personal allowance plus additions for children and dependants
•any appropriate premium e.g. disability) in line with the IS system •mortgage interest payments in line with the IS system

Back to Work Bonus A bonus will be introduced with the aim of encouraging part-time workers to move into full-time work. The bonus will be accumulated from any earnings which are clawed-back from earnings which are greater than the 'disregard' ceilings of £5 per week for a single person and £1O per week for a couple. The Benefits Agency will set aside half the clawed-back benefit to be drawn upon as a bonus when the claimant finds work of more than l6 hours per week (or 24 hours per week for partners).

The bonus is likely to be taxable and will have a maximum value of £1,000. However, the White Paper gives no indication of how long a person can maintain their entitlement to the bonus For example, will a claimant retain his/her entitlement to the bonus if it takes 6 months or longer to find work of over l6 hours? The Department will also have to decide whether the level of earnings will be capped. This was the case with 'Action Credit' which was a similar scheme, piloted by the Benefits Service in August 1989.

Pensions Contributory JSA, like UB. will also take occupational and personal pensions into account but the rules will be revised. At present, if a claimant is over 55 and receives this type of pension. his/her UB is reduced £ for £ by any amount in excess of £35 per week. For many people in these circumstances. their UB is either lost completely or is reduced to a negligible amount.

For contributory JSA. benefit will be deducted for pensions in excess of £50 per week "in recognition of those who have been providing for their own retirement". But this concession will be accompanied by an abolition of the age threshold, which will make contributory JSA into a form of means-tested benefit for all claimants in receipt of occupational and personal pensions. Transitional protection will be available to those people who lose as a result of this change.

21 Hour Rule There will be little change to the benefit rules which allow claimants to study part-time. The definition of the rule was confirmed recently by a Minister who stated that "the 21 hour rule is a special provision which enables Income Support claimants who are unemployed to spend their time

usefully in part-time work". The only notable change is the language used: the "rules governing study on benefit are designed to allow people to undertake study. which will increase their employability".

3. JOBSEEKER'S AGREEMENT AND DIRECTION

The introduction of two new measures marks the enforcement of an even stricter benefit regime than is currently the case:

• Under the Jobseeker's Agreement all unemployed people will be required to sign an individually-tailored Agreement which will serve as a form of contract compliance for claimants. with benefit disqualification if they default from it.

• The Agreement is to be accompanied by the 'Jobseeker's Direction', which will allow ES staff to instruct claimants to carry out specific activities to improve their prospects of returning to work.

These measures mean that under JSA. the concept of voluntary participation in back-to-work schemes is lost. Presently, the only compulsory outcomes are the mandatory schemes for the longterm unemployed (Restart Courses. Joplan Workshops and Workwise) who refuse to go on voluntary Government schemes.

4. AVAILABILITY AND JOB SEEKING TESTS

As well as making more Government schemes compulsory, JSA will also make it very difficult for claimants to refuse vacancies offered by ES staff, even when these are inappropriate to their skills and circumstances. Unlike the daily availability required for UB, claimants will now be expected to be available for a minimum of 43 hours a week. People who are offered suitable work of fewer hours will be expected to take it, but there is no specification of the minimum number of hours that will be acceptable. At present, you have to show good cause for rejecting a job which offers less than 24 hours work per week.

Good cause for declining work or restricting the number of hours of availability will only be allowed:

• on health grounds
• for religious or conscientious convictions
• to meet caring responsibilities

These circumstances are defined in the present social security regulations but there are two additional exemptions in these regulations that are absent from the White Paper:

• if travelling time is excessive
• if work-based expenses represent an unreasonably high proportion of the wages

Benefit Sanctions Benefit disqualifications for both contributory and income-related JSA will be extended to people who do not complete and sign the Jobseeker's Agreement. As now, people who fail to attend an ES interview will receive no benefit until they do so. People will continue to be disqualified for benefit for up to 26 weeks if they leave work voluntarily or through misconduct and if they refuse a job offer notified to them by the ES.

One of the new benefit sanctions will be aimed at people who refuse to attend compulsory courses for the unemployed and prescribed training courses, or who fail to act upon the Jobseeker's Direction. At present, non-attendance on mandatory courses is penalised by reducing IS by 40% for the week in question. This sanction will be substituted by one disqualifying benefit entitlement for two weeks, rising to four if the offence is repeated.

5. WHO LOSES OUT?

Most UB claimants will lose out under JSA. However certain groups will lose out more than others:

Young Adults People aged between 18 and 24 who are currently entitled to UB receive the same level of benefit as all other UB claimants. But since non-means-tested JSA is to be aligned with present IS levels. this age group will in the future receive a reduced rate. For single claimants under 25 this will mean a cut of 20% to their benefit (from current rates of £46.45 per week to £36.95).

Working Partners and Women Claimants with partners working full-time will lose entitlement to JSA at the six month stage. instead of after 12 months as with UB. This will especially hit young people. but other claimants in this position will lose at least half of their benefit income in the first 12 months of unemployment. More women will lose than men as over 70% of men who would become ineligible for UB will be able to claim means-tested JSA instead. However. only 43% of female claimants will be entitled to do likewise - mainly because they have partners in full-time employment. which invalidates eligibility for means-tested JSA.

Savings and Redundancy Payments People claiming for dependants will have to claim means-tested JSA from the start of unemployment even if they are eligible for non means-tested JSA. Claimants in this position with combined savings and redundancy payments over £8.000 will be ineligible for means tested JSA. and couples will only receive 6 months of personal JSA allowance (£1.200.30) a cut to their benefit of 70%.

Because non-means-tested JSA is only half that of UB people with savings will be disallowed means-tested benefit at a much earlier stage. A single claimant with combined savings and redundancy payments of over £8.000 would have continued to receive UB for a full 12 months amounting to a total of £2.415. Under JSA. the same person would only receive JSA for 6 months (£1 200.30) a cut of 50%. If a claimant in this position has a non-working partner
the loss will be even greater. The combined annual total for the UB personal allowance and the additional weekly payment for dependant partners come to £3 905.20.

The Sick and Disabled From April 1995 Invalidity Benefit (IVB) will be replaced by Incapacity Benefit (IB). It is estimated that in the following two years. 200 00O people presently classed as unfit for work will be reclassified as unemployed. due to the stricter definition of fitness for work.

The Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) have found a number of cases where those who have lost their entitlement to Incapacity Benefit have nevertheless. been refused Unemployment Benefit by Job Centres on the grounds that the person

is not available for work. There is a fear that under an even tougher regime. more sick and disabled people will end up with no benefit at all.

332/94: For Immediate Release: 19 December 1994

MP DEMANDS INQUEST ON FAILED BID

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is convening a inquest into Pendle Council's failed attempt to wrest cash from the Government's Single Regeneration Budget - money earmarked for deprived areas of the country which councils must bid for. He is calling a meeting with council leaders early next month to conduct a post mortem on the failed bid. The Liberal controlled council has sought to pin the blame on the MP.

Prentice said: "I am absolutely determined to get to the bottom of this. I am simply not prepared to take responsibility for this failure when my views were not even sought. I want to know who took the conscious decision not to involve me in the formulation of the bid and in the subsequent approach to Ministers. I also want to know who was involved in putting the bid together as well as its total cost. We need to know why Pendle's bid went wrong. Burnley and Blackburn are getting extra cash - and they need it - but we also have pressing needs here in Pendle."

"The Liberal chair of the council's Plans Sub Committee, Tony Greaves, wants to shuffle responsibility for his failure onto my shoulders when I was neither asked to lobby Ministers nor consulted over the shape of the bid. The Liberal controlled council got things badly wrong but doesn't have the grace to admit it."

"Tony Greaves, commonly regarded as one of their more aerated, volatile and eccentric councillors, seeks to lay the responsibility at my door. Where on earth does that leave the Liberal Democrat MPs who represent Southwark; Liverpool; Alnwick/Berwick-upon-Tweed/Castle Morpeth; Cheltenham; Christchurch/East Dorset; North Devon; North Cornwall and Truro - all Liberal Democrat council areas which, like Liberal controlled Pendle, submitted bids that failed? And, of course, there was the failed bid from Yeovil - represented in Parliament by Paddy Ashdown MP, leader of the Liberal Democrats."

333/94: For Immediate Release: December 1994

LORD ARCHER

334/94: For Immediate Release: 20 December 1994

MP URGES SCHOOLS TO ASK FOR DUCHY OF LANCASTER CASH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for local schools to bid for cash from the Duchy of Lancaster’s Benevolent Fund which distributes money from the estates of those living in the old Lancashire County boundaries who die without making a will. The Royal Grammar School at Lancaster has been consistently successful in getting cash from the hoard which has given a total

of £20,000 since 1990 towards a new mathematics and information technology classroom block.

“Only a handful of schools have approached the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster out of the 710 in Lancashire alone. There were six bids this year, four in 1993, one in 1992, two in 1991, two in 1990, one in 1989 and two in 1988. And these figures, of course, include the ubiquitous Royal Grammar School.”

“My advice is to drop a line to David Hunt MP, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. It is about time North East Lancashire got its share of the money that is going.”

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01/95: For Immediate Release: 4 January 1995

MP SLAMS LENGTH OF UK WORKING WEEK

People in Britain are working longer hours - and often for less money - than their counterparts in Europe says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP claims people here work over three hours a week longer than the average of the 12 European Union countries.

Prentice said: "In his New Year message to the Tory faithful, the Prime Minister had a lot to say about Europe. But it was all about divisions within the Conservative Party and not about how Britain is shaping up in comparison with the rest of Europe. Why couldn't he explain why we in Britain work longer hours than our neighbours on the continent with less job security and with no minimum wage protection."

Next week, when Parliament returns after the New Year break, the Government will be introducing the Jobseekers Bill which will stop all benefit after six months of unemployment. The MP said: "It is all part of the strategy of turning Britain into a low wage, sweat shop, off-shore island where terms and conditions that would be unacceptable in mainland Europe are tolerated here."

Note to Editors: Employees Working Full Time - hours per week

UK 43.4	France 39.7
Portugal 41.5	Netherlands 38.9
Spain 40.5	Italy 38.7
Ireland 40.4	Denmark 38.4
Greece 40.3	Belgium 38.0
Germany 39.8	
Luxembourg 39.8	EU Average 40.3

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey

02/95: For Immediate Release: 4 January 1995

LIBERAL REFUSES TO APOLOGISE TO MP

Veteran Liberal councillor, Tony Greaves, has refused to apologise to local MP, Gordon Prentice, for trying to pin the blame on the MP for Pendle Council's failed bid for cash from the Government's "Single Regeneration Budget" - money earmarked to provide special help for run down areas.

The Liberal councillor dubbed the MP a *"waste of time"* when news of the failed bid came through - even though the MP's help was never sought by the Council nor were his views canvassed on the shape of the bid.

The MP said: "So far as this Liberal controlled Council is concerned, it is open season on the truth. Why is it so difficult for any of them to say publicly what they all admit privately? There are very large sums of public money at stake here and Pendle has lost out. People living in the area have the right to know why the bid went off the rails when our neighbours in Hyndburn, Burnley and Blackburn succeeded."

"And what do I think about Councillor Tony Greaves? Clearly, he is someone congenitally incapable of accepting responsibility for anything that goes wrong. Hell will freeze over before Pendle's Liberal controlled council takes responsibility for its own actions."

Note to Editors: On 28 December the MP wrote to Cllr Greaves:

"As you know, the Chief Executive, on behalf of the Council, has requested a meeting with me to discuss a number of important issues which the Council is trying to progress. Mr Barnes mentioned the A56 trunking issue, the local government finance settlement and others.

"Mr Barnes did not mention in his letter to me the failed Single Regeneration Budget bid but, in the light of everything that has happened, I have asked for it to be put on the agenda. I know you have been closely associated with the bid and I would like to hear your views in detail on what went wrong and how we can maximise Pendle Council's chances for a successful bid in 1995.
(more follows)

No Apology to MP

"But first, I think, we need to set the record straight. I am enclosing a copy of the front page of the Nelson Leader of 9 December in which you accuse me of being a *"waste of time*" saying I didn't bat hard enough for Pendle in its bid for SRB money. I consider this to be deeply damaging to me as Pendle's MP in that it seeks to give the impression that I was asked to support the bid but chose to sit on my hands. I am therefore asking you for an apology, acknowledging that my help was never sought in any way nor were my views canvassed by the Council. Once I have this apology from you I believe my relationship with the Council will be put on firmer ground for the future."

Note 2 to Editors: The MP has called a meeting this Friday to discuss with the Council what went wrong with the SRB Bid.

03/95: For Immediate Release: 9 January 1995

MP ADMITS "I AM NO MIND-READER"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has invited Pendle Chief Executive, Stephen Barnes, to say publicly what the MP alleges he is prepared to admit privately - that the MP's help was never sought to boost the chances of Pendle Council's bid for cash from the Government's Single Regeneration Budget.

The MP told a meeting of Labour Party supporters at the weekend that the council's Chief Executive had a responsibility to set the record straight. The MP said: "Whatever attributes I may bring to the job of Member of Parliament being a mind-reader is not one of them. If the Liberal led council thinks my involvement will help then they've

got to tell me. I can't pick up thought waves from the Leader of the Council's office at the Town Hall!"

"I am happy to help with this year's bid. I shall be doing my level best to find out from Government Ministers why Pendle's bid for cash failed this time around. We need to ensure the council doesn't make the same mistake twice."

"I also hope the "waste of time" jibe by veteran Liberal councillor, Tony Greaves, will be finally buried. I have taken the trouble to find out how many Liberal Democrat MPs either wrote to the Environment Secretary in support of an SRB bid or asked for a meeting with him concerning a bid from their own or another local authority."

"Astonishingly, only one Liberal Democrat MP out of 16, whose councils submitted bids, bothered to lobby Ministers. That puts into perspective the accusations by Pendle's Liberal councillors. I am surprised they have the brass neck even to mention the subject - let alone to try and make political capital out of it."

04/95: Letter for publication **to Leader Times 9 January 1995**

Dear Editor

The Liberal Leader of Pendle Council, Alan Davies, takes me to task over the failure of Pendle Council's bid for cash from the Government's Single Regeneration Budget. Instead of admitting openly that the Liberal led council never sought my help, he seeks to turn the issue on its head by accusing me of failing to ask to be involved.

I have not been involved in the Council's Housing Investment Programme nor in any bids it may have made for national lottery money. Am I to be held responsible for the outcome of these and, no doubt, a hundred and one other actions by the council? I would like to know.

On the day the story broke (9 December), I wrote to the Chief Executive asking him to tell the local press that the council had not sought to involve me in any way. He refused to do this saying it would enmesh him in political arguments. I now have a fair idea of what happened and when and I have, this week, again asked him to set the record straight by writing to you.

I have also told the Chief Executive that we need to establish a clearly understood mechanism within the council about my involvement or non-involvement in issues which come before it. I am simply not prepared to take the flak for decisions I am not party to.

I have now been assured that the council will involve me in the 1995 bid for SRB money and I am eager to give what help and advice I can. Pendle has more than its fair share of problems and extra cash from the Government is sorely needed.

As it happens, the bid put forward by the council last year would not have been my first choice. I was, of course, never invited to comment on the shape of the bid - only to take responsibility afterwards for its failure.

Yours etc
GORDON PRENTICE MP 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

05/95: For Immediate Release: 11 January 1995

PENDLE COUNCIL FACES “DOUBLE WHAMMY” AS CUTS BITE

Pendle people will have to pay more for fewer services as a result of the Government’s local finance settlement, details of which were unveiled before Christmas. Local MP, Gordon Prentice said Pendle faces a “double whammy” as the council tax and council rents go through the roof.

The prediction was made by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who joined an all-party deputation of councillors in London today to lobby Local Government Minister, Robert Jones MP, in his 15th floor office at the Environment Department’s Marsham Street HQ.

The MP said: “Council Tax is going to rise by double the rate of inflation and last night the Council agreed to increase rents by just over 8%. These are punitive increases forced on the local authority by the Government.”

“The case for Pendle was powerfully put by the deputation. Indeed, many of the key issues on capping and on the calculation of the Standard Spending Assessment (which affects the amount of grant the council gets from the Government) had been raised with Robert Jones at an earlier meeting on 29 September involving the five East Lancashire authorities.

“What kind of lunatic system is it that has Bath and Bournemouth ranked higher in terms of deprivation than Pendle? It defies common-sense. Unfortunately, I doubt if all the most meticulously researched facts in the world could persuade Robert Jones to change his mind. Sound arguments went into one ear and out the other without stopping.”

Once Government Ministers have finished their consultations on the local government finance settlement it comes back to the Commons for final approval.

06/95: For Immediate Release: 12 January 1995

MP KEEPS UP THE STRUGGLE FOR DISABLED RIGHTS

The rights of disabled people should be put at the top of the political agenda according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster following the publication today of the Government’s Disability Discrimination Bill.

On Tuesday, Shadow Minister for the Disabled, Tom Clarke, presented to the Commons a 30,000 signature national petition on disabled rights, launched last year by the Labour Party.

The MP said: "Labour remains committed to the principles of full and comprehensive civil rights for Britains 6.5 million disabled people as set out in Roger Berry’s Private Members Bill which was shamefully talked out of time last year. The 30,000 signature petition is another indication of the depth and strength of feeling about this issue.”

"The reintroduction of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill by Labour MP, Harry Barnes, is wholly supported by The Labour Party, by disabled persons' groups and the general public. Only the intolerable and indefensible behaviour of the Conservative Government last year prevented the Bill's passage in the Commons.”

"The Government's Bill doesn't go far enough. It should drop it and throw its full weight behind Harry Barnes' Private Members Bill which guarantees comprehensive civil rights for disabled people."

07/95: For Immediate Release: 12 January 1995

BURNLEY NHS TRUST "DESERVES A BREATHING SPACE" says PENDLE MP

Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust which has been engulfed in controversy should be given a breathing space to tackle the management issues which have wracked it for months, says Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

The MP has joined his colleague, Burnley MP, Peter Pike in withdrawing his demand for an independent public inquiry believing the the new Chairman of the Trust, Dr Fred Archer, should be given a chance to put the Trust back on an even keel.

The MP said: "Peter and I had a private meeting with Dr Archer and the Acting Chief Executive, David Chew, last week. Our discussion ranged over a number of issues including the question of the reinstatement of Mr Ian Mahady."

"I know the Trust is now tackling the issues which plunged it into crisis last year and, like Peter Pike, I believe the new Chairman and the Trust Board should be allowed to plan, consult and implement the changes that are necessary without feeling they are constantly in a gold fish bowl."

08/95: For Immediate Release: 12 January 1995

PM SAYS BOARDROOM PAY AND PERKS NOT A MATTER FOR HIM

The Prime Minister. John Major, has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that the pay and perks of Britain's bosses are not matters for him. In a letter to the Pendle MP, the Prime Minister also denied newspaper claims that he had set up a Cabinet committee to look into the issue.

Prentice said: "His refusal to take any reposnibility for the explosion in boardroom pay and perks is par for the course. But for people here in the North West who have seen at first hand the enormous hike in the salary of North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher, there is a feeling of deep resentment. His salary is up 619% to £338,000 from his predecessor's £47,000 before privatisation. And that third of a million excludes the pension contribution of £22,500 paid by the company."

The MP pledged: "An incoming Labour Government will tackle these boardroom excesses. All this is happening at a time when 14 million people in Britain have less than £115 a week after housing costs to live on - that is 1 in 4. This is up from 1 in 10 in 1979."

"The poorest 10% of the population have seen their incomes fall by 17.5% since 1979 (after housing costs)."

Note to Editors: All twelve chairmen of the regional electricity companies (RECs) have made a million pounds out of privatisation six of these chairmen have made more than two million pounds since privatisation REC directors each hold £500,000

worth of share option profit 63 top directors of electricity companies hold £30 million worth of share option profit between them. The highest paid directors in the RECs earn on average £250,000. 40,000 jobs have been lost in the electricity industry since privatisation and another 5,000 jobs are planned to be cut.

Five chairmen of regional water companies have made a million pounds out of privatisation 42 water directors hold £8 million worth of share option profit water directors each hold £200,000 worth of share option profit The Chairman of North West water has seen his salary increase by on average 619%% since privatisation Water companies have cut 9,000 jobs since privatisation and plan to cut another 1,800 jobs

Pay and Perks

Cedric Brown, Chief Executive of British Gas recently took a 75% salary increase from £270,000 to £475,000 a year only days after this excess was revealed, British Gas confirmed pay cuts of around 16% for 2,600 showroom staff The highest paid director at BG received £386,000 in 1994 The Chairman, Richard Giordano has had his pay increased to £450,000 for a 3 day week BG have axed 26,000 jobs since privatisation and plan to cut a further 20,000

Though the Opposition has forced the Tories to acknowledge the widespread anger across the country about boardroom excesses, they have done nothing to stop them.

"...I do not agree with excessive and unjustifiable salary increases. I have made that perfectly clear but for companies within the private sector that must be a matter for their shareholders and not for the government." (**John Major,** HOC: 22nd Nov 1994)

Mr Aitken: *The government do not consider that its proper role is to set levels of pay for executives of private companies. The salaries and other remuneration of any private company are a matter for the company and its shareholders."*
(Hansard col 786, 15th December 1994)

• **President of the CBI, Sir Bryan Nicholson** also is concerned about executive pay: *"We cannot be satisfied with a situation in which pay increases for the management and the board run ahead of those awarded to the workforce in general. I do not mind telling you that the overwhelming majority of the CBI members I meet are not satisfied."* (Speech to CBI conference, 7th Nov 1994)

09/95: For Immediate Release: 17 January 1995

MP BACKS ST JOSEPHS IN CLASH WITH PENDLE COUNCIL

The dispute between St Joseph's and Pendle Council over the closing times of its Parish Centre has brought local MP, Gordon Prentice, down on the side of the angels!

The clash between church and (local) state came to a head late last year when the Council vetoed plans for late night conviviality at the centre in Barnoldswick which is open to all denominations and none.

The MP said: “The Parish Priest, Father Paul Reid, came to see me in December with a parishioner to see if I could help in any way. I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard that the Council had decided to slap a 10.30pm closure on their New Year’s Eve Party! This must be one of the most bizarre decisions of all time.

“I appealed to the Liberal led Council to display some common-sense and I pressed for a re-think. I was told my intervention had come too late to change the decision on the New Year’s Eve Party.”

“I see the whole issue has been discussed by the Town Council and it is down for debate again at Pendle Council. This is progress! Surely the centre should be allowed some latitude in its closing times.”

“The centre is not out to make the lives of people living nearby a misery. We are not talking here about Hells Angels. In fact, precisely the opposite.”

10/95: For Immediate Release: 17 January 1995

PENDLE MP TO VISIT KASHMIR

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to visit Kashmir next week as part of an all Party delegation of MPs. The MP will meet Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and other leading politicians as well as officials at the British High Commission in Islamabad.

The MP said: “Kashmir has had a troubled history and I have many constituents here in Pendle who long for a resolution of the conflict there. I have been horrified to hear about the atrocities committed by the Indian army and I shall have an opportunity to see for myself, first hand, what so many people have told me about.”

Since his election to the Commons, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has backed moves to give the people of Kashmir the right to self determination. He also wants respected, independent groups such as Amnesty International free access to Kashmir to investigate claims of human rights abuses. Reports of torture, rape and gross violations of human rights are now too insistent to be ignored by the British Government.”

Note to Editors: On 27th October 1947 Indian troops occupied most of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and 45 years later those occupying forces still remain. The MP has called on the Government to support the United Nations Resolutions of 1948,1949 and 1960 which upheld the rights of the Kashmiri people to self-determination through a United Nations supervised plebiscite. This would fulfil the explicit commitment made to the people of Kashmir by Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India.

11/95: For Immediate Release: 17 January 1995

PENDLE MP CONDEMNS SILENT LORD ARCHER IN COMMONS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice has again thrown a spotlight on the controversial Tory peer and former Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party, Lord Archer. A year ago this month, the millionaire novelist bought the first tranche of shares in Anglia

Television that were to net him a profit of £80,000 which he passed to his colleague, Mr Broosk Saib.

The MP said: "To say I feel strongly about this is an understatement. Lord Archer made more money in the space of a few days than many of my constituents earn in a decade. And to add insult to injury he refuses to reply to letters I have sent to him which raise legitimate questions about the whole saga."

"When I raised the matter in an adjournment debate just before the Christmas recess, the Deputy Speaker, Dame Janet Fookes, ruled that I could not refer critically to the peer's behaviour. I have therefore tabled a Commons motion setting out the questions that remain unanswered."

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads:

CONDUCT OF LORD ARCHER OF WESTON-SUPER-MARE IN RESPECT OF SHARE DEALING

Mr Gordon Prentice, Mr Jeremy Corbyn, Mr John Cummings, Mr Harry Cohen, Mr Harry Barnes, Mr Ian McCartney and others

"That this House recalls that on 13th January 1994, Lord Archer purchased the first of two tranches of Anglia TV shares and notes his statement in July 1994 that it was completely untrue that he bought shares and that such an accusation was libellous; notes that he subsequently confessed that he had made a grave error in buying shares and his later statement that the Department of Trade and Industry report completely exonerated him; condemns his unwillingness to reply to letters about these issues from the honourable Member for Pendle; calls on the noble Lord to explain why he bought shares on behalf of Mr Broosk Saib, why he was confident the share price would rise, why he asked for the transaction to be done on new account dealing terms, whether the shares were to be held as a long-term investment and, if so, whether the noble Lord or Mr Saib would pay the £240,000 for the shares on settlement day; and calls on the noble Lord to

follow the injunction of the Chairman of the Conservative Party who said in September that it would be better for the noble Lord to speak out rather than not.

12/95: For Immediate Release: 17 January 1995

MP BACKS HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION BILL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be backing two Private Members Bills that come before the House of Commons on Friday 20 January. The MP said: "I want to see an economy where growth does not require increasing demand for energy and these measures fit the bill."

The Home Energy Conservation Bll is being introduced by Liberal Democrat MP, Diana Maddock, who came top of the ballot for Private Members Bills. The Bill is also sponsored by Labour's John McAllion MP, Alan Simpson MP, and Malcolm Wicks MP. It builds on several earlier initiatives to improve energy conservation in homes throughout the UK.

Housing Authorities are designated 'energy conservation authorities' and given a number of new duties and powers. They are required to assess energy efficiency in residential accommodation in their ownership and to take reasonable steps to do so in other residential accommodation in their area. The authority will also be required to investigate the potential for energy savings and publish a strategy report. In the report the authority may assess likely decreases in emissions, new jobs created and savings in bills which would arise from the energy saving proposals.

The Energy Saving Materials (Reduction of VAT) bill is being introduced by Labour MP, Alan Simpson, with all party support. It provides for the reduction of VAT from 17.5% to 8% on any materials used for the purpose of energy conservation. It builds on the Labour Party *Green Households* document of 1991, which proposed that energy efficient appliances, roof insulation and hot water lagging should be subject to reduced rates of VAT.

The Pendle MP said: "There is no disagreement here. These Bills deserve wide support."

13/95: For Immediate Release: 17 January 1995

PENDLE MP SLATES TORY RECORD

The Finance Bill - which puts the Budget proposals into law - was slated today by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster, he described it as soft on vested interests while imposing extra costs on those least able to afford them.

The Bill which gets its second reading today in the Commons, includes the measures announced in the mini Budget - caused by the Government's defeat on VAT on fuel. "The mini Budget alone will raise taxes on a typical family by about £30 a year. Beer is up 1p a pint, wine by 5p a bottle, spirits up 26p a bottle and petrol is up 5p a gallon."

"Overall, a typical family in Pendle will have to pay an additional £300 in tax next year on top of the £500 they are already paying this year. All this extra taxation has been brought in by the Conservatives to pay for years of economic failure." (see below) "It is a chilling catalogue of incompetence and mismanagement."

Note to Editors:

GROWTH; Since 1979 growth has been, on average, 1.7%, slower than any other country in the G7 and the average growth in Europe & OECD over the same period. Under the Tories we have had the lowest 15 year period of growth since 1945. The long-run growth rate 1948-79 of the U.K economy was 2.7%.

INVESTMENT; Investment in the U.K as a proportion of GDP over 1979-93 was lower than any other G7 country. It has fallen from 18.6% to 15% in 1993. Low investment means low growth. Business-i.e private sector-investment, as a proportion of GDP is lower now than it was in 1979. Over the period 1980-90 in the G7 only the US had a lower level of government investment as a proportion of GDP than the U.K.

EXPORTS; The lowest rate of export growth in the G7 since 1979 and the highest level of imports as a proportion of GDP.

UNEMPLOYMENT; Since 1979 the fraction of the unemployed out of work for more than a year has increased also by 50% to reach just over 1 million people. There is an increasing mismatch between the skills of the unemployed and those that are needed by industry.

The Tory Record

INEQUALITY; Since 1979 the income of the poorest 10% after housing costs fell by 17% from £74 a week to £61 in 1994 prices, while that of the richest 10% increased by 62% from £315 a week to £510. The number of people living in poverty i.e in households with incomes below half that of the average, increased from 5 million to 13.9 million.

SKILLS; Out of 23 countries in the OECD the U.K has the second lowest proportion of 18 year olds in full-time education, after Turkey. In their 1994 4th quarter survey the CBI found that 10% of firms reported a shortage of skilled labour as most likely to limit their output, up from 6% in 1993. In their November inflation report the Bank of England said 'At present, skill shortages are not so acute as to pose a major threat of wage inflation ... there is some evidence of skill shortages and settlements may be edging upwards'.

DEFICIT; The price of economic failure has been high resulting in mass unemployment and the largest tax increase in Britain's history. In 1993 the U.K had a government deficit equal to 5% of GDP, the highest of any G7 country.

General Economy

GROWTH; The economy grew at an annual rate of 3.6% (3.2% excluding oil) in the 3rd quarter. After only one year of output above the pre-recession level, the government has had to raise interest rates twice in four months from 5.75% to 6.25% to choke off inflationary pressures. The economy does not have sufficient capacity for strong growth. Britain has too few manufacturing firms, a dearth of skilled workers and managers, and a decaying economic infrastructure. This low capacity is due to the poor investment record of this government.

INDUSTRY; Manufacturing output grew by 5.0% at an annual rate in the third quarter. In 1979 manufacturing accounted for 30% of output but by 1993 it had fallen to 20% with the loss of over 2.5 million jobs. Domestic production cannot meet demand hence rising imports.

INVESTMENT; Investment is still over 13% below the peak before the recession. The U.K invested a smaller proportion of GDP than any other G7 country over the period 1979-93. Investment increased at annual rate of 3.4% in the Q3 of 1994. Manufacturing investment in Plant & Equipment has fallen by 30% since 1990, 1st quarter.

TRADE; Even though exports grew was 13% at an annual rate in September imports are growing at 7.5% and are still greater than exports leaving a trade deficit of over £1.5 billion in the 2nd quarter. No less than 77% of the £13 billion deficit in 1993 was accounted for by manufactured goods. The trade deficit widened to £0.6 billion in October from £0.5 billion in September, 1994 is showing a deficit of £7.6 billion so far. For every £100 worth of goods we exported in 1993 we bought £105 worth of goods from abroad. Since 1979 the U.K has had a higher level of imports as a proportion of GDP than any other G7 country.

INFLATION; Prices increased by 2.6% annually (all items) in November, 2.3% excluding mortgages and 2.1% excluding housing. However producer output prices are running at 2.4%, producer input prices at 7.9% and

manufacturing wages at 4.75% there are inflationary pressures. Figures from the CBI figures show that the proportion of firms working at full capacity is already at the level it was in July 1990 before the last recession.

INTEREST RATES; Currently 6.25%, up 0.5% in September & December. The City expects interest rates to rise to around 9% by January 1995, long-term rates are already higher in the U.K than in the USA, Japan, Germany and France.

UNEMPLOYMENT; In November the rate was 8.8%, 2.4 million people, and it has fallen by over 400,000 since the end of 1992 according to Portillo, but total employment has also fallen by just under 440,000 since the middle of 1992, the trough of the recession. However, 90% of the jobs created in this recovery are part-time. Employment in manufacturing fell by 45,000 over the year to the October compared with 31,000 in the previous year a 45% increase.

PSBR; The Public Sector Borrowing Requirement in October 1994 was minus £0.6 billion i.e a repayment, the PSBR for the first 7 months of 1994-95 was £19.2 billion compared with £26.4 billion for the same period last year. Excluding privatisation the PSBR was £0.9 billion i.e not a repayment. The last previous 8 months each saw a positive PSBR averaging £4.4 billion or £4.9 billion excluding privatisation proceeds. The sale of public assets has credited this government with £5.7 billion this year alone, since 1979 the government has received £77 billion in privatisation proceeds in 1994 prices.

RECOVERY; The government claims that the people are benefiting from a recovery in the economy but the truth is that for most people they have no more money in their pockets after tax increases, retail sales have been flat from September to October. 90% of the jobs created in the recovery are part-time.

LIVING STANDARDS; The Tories claim that people can expect a rise in living standards over the next year but this claim is completely out of touch with the daily experience of ordinary people. As the Maples report confirmed the Tories in private admit their public lie;

" ..... the reality is the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest, who are getting poorer"

"While we trumpet the recovery, the voters do not think the recession has ended. They still fear unemployment, have 'no more money in their pocket etc.' What we are saying is completely at odds with their experience."

A parliamentary question answered by the Treasury estimates that a typical family will see a small increase in their income but once housing costs are taken in to account they will see a fall in their living standards over the coming financial year.

As the government hammers homeowners with cuts in mortgage interest tax relief, rising interest rates and the cuts in income support for homeowners the typical family will paying £50 a month more in housing costs from April 1995 compared to a year earlier.

These changes together with the extra Tory taxes will mean that the net income of a typical taxpayer will be £13.15 a week lower in April 1995 than a year earlier and £20.50 a week lower by April 1996.

14/95: For Immediate Release: 18 January 1995

KASHMIR VISIT OFF

The all Party delegation of MPs due to leave for Kashmir on Sunday 23 January has been called off.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I was told today of some problem with the diaries of the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir."

"I hope the visit can be re-scheduled on mutually convenient dates before too long."

17/95: For Immediate Release: 18 January 1995

NO CHANGE IN PENDLE JOBLESS

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit in December last year was 2,298 compared with 2,309 in November. In December 1,782 men were out of work (8.2%) and 513 women (3.2).

Vacancies were down sharply at Nelson Job Centre from 232 in November to 143 in December. In Colne the respective figures are 150 and 113.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "What everyone is interested in is the trend and it is good news that unemployment is falling as the economy emerges from recession. The country cannot be locked in recession permanently and we all want to see people without jobs get back into work."

"The second issue concerns the integrity of the statistics themselves. In its evidence to the Nolan Committee on Standards of Conduct in Public Life, the Labour Party has called for a single Government Statistical Service bringing together within a single culture, and under the same effective code of practice for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of official statistics, the Central Statistical Office and departmental, agency and NHS statistical services. We want statistics that can be trusted."

8/95: For Immediate Release: 18 January 1995

LOCAL RAILWAY "DOOMED" AFTER PRIVATISATION WARNS PRENTICE

Local rail services in Pendle will not survive privatisation says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, ahead of today's Commons debate on through ticketing, the MP warned that the line to Colne would be a prime candidate for closure. "Under the

Rail Regulator's Option 1, the nearest station where passengers could buy a through ticket to anywhere in Britain would be Burnley Central and, beyond that, Blackburn."

"We already know the track to Colne is expensive to maintain and trains have had to travel along that stretch at at speeds slower than those achieved by George Stephenson's Rocket. It took questions in Parliament to the Prime Minister to get things moving. The cost of maintaining the viaduct at Colne is another cause for concern."

The MP continued: "The Government has starved the railways of investment and it now uses poor services as an excuse for privatisation. I used to be able to get a sleeper from Preston to London but that's disappeared. Now Motorail has gone and five sleeper services to Scotland have been merged into two."

"The key question is this. If the Regulator comes up with a small list of core stations for through ticketing - such as the 294 mentioned as option 1 - will the Government intervene or simply acquiesce?"

19/95: For Immediate Release: 19 January 1995

MP BLASTS CHANGES IN LEGAL AID

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed the Government's decision to abolish the Legal Aid Advisory Committee which he claims is being wound up as an act of spite.

The Order which is being debated in the Commons today will kill off a Committee which has been consistently critical of the Government's policy on legal aid.

The MP said: "Every week I get a steady stream of people coming to see me at my surgeries unable to get legal aid because they are not absolutely on the bread line. They are people to whom justice is being denied."

"The Government's proposals are crude, uncosted and unjust. They will inevitably result in absurd anomalies and serious injustices in different regions of the country. We will see an unprecedented element of arbitrariness brought into the administration of Legal Aid" said Prentice.

Note to Editors: The Lord Chancellor's Legal Aid Advisory Committee was established in 1949 by the same Labour Government that founded the Legal Aid scheme. The primary purpose of the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949 was to assist those of "small or moderate means" to get access to justice. Labour is still committed to honouring that principle.

The role of the Committee was to be a high-powered, independent advisory body to both the Lord Chancellor and the Law Society, which until 1989 was responsible for administering Legal Aid (now the responsibility of the Legal Aid Board), on the provision of publicly-funded legal services.

The Committee's 1994 Annual Report was, not for the first time, highly critical of the Lord Chancellor's policies on Legal Aid and backed up many of the criticisms being made by Labour Opposition.

Specific criticisms made by the Committee included:

• That the LCD and the Legal Aid Board still did not have sufficient management information on which to base sound policy.
• That changes to Legal Aid eligibility in April 1994 fell "well short of restoration in real terms" of the
savage cuts of the previous year.
• That the LCD had refused calls by the Committee,
Labour and the Home Affairs Select Committee to make use of the ~73 million underspend on the Legal Aid
budget to help restore eligibility levels.

Legal Aid

Just two weeks after the publication of the Committee's latest Annual Report, the Lord Chancellor announced that he was abolishing the Committee. Labour rejects the notion that the Committee is no longer needed. We believe that the Committee should be retained and given better access to information and that the need for such a well-established, independent and free-thinking Committee, whose only concern is the public interest, is greater than ever.

The wider debate In his speech at the Social Market Foundation last Wednesday the Lord Chancellor announced that he planned to introduce 'capping' for the Legal Aid budget on a regional basis and that regional Legal Aid Board Offices would effectively act as 'fundholders' akin to fundholders in the NHS.

Key points

The Lord Chancellor repeatedly states that the Legal Aid scheme is helping more and more people. This is true, but they are drawn from an increasingly narrow section of society. Legal Aid eligibility levels are now pegged to Income Support eligibility levels, making the scheme accessible only to the very poor. Millions of working people, whose taxes fund the Legal Aid scheme, receive nothing in return from it and are denied access to justice by Britain's high legal services costs.

Mackay alleges that the chief cause of the soaring cost of Legal Aid is 'supplier-induced demand' on the part of the legal profession. Whilst this may be true of a tiny minority of unscrupulous solicitors it is not the primary cause of the rising cost of the scheme. The primary causes are two-fold: First, the Government's own legislation, such as the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Children Act 1989, the cost implications of which the Government failed completely to account for. Second, the increased need of the poor to take legal advice because of the national crisis in the fields of employment, housing, social security and immigration. Statistics in the Government's own publication 'Social Trends' prove that the numbers seeking Legal Aid between 1981 and 1991 increased by 50%, but so did the numbers seeking help from Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Relate, the Samaritans and other such advice and counselling services.

The Lord Chancellor claims that he has rejected the notion of fundholding, declaring it inappropriate for the delivery of publicly-funded legal services. Although he has abandoned the word 'fundholding' he has clearly not abandoned the policy in substance. The people in the regional Legal Aid Board Offices who will have to administer the new, cash-limited budgets will, to all intents and purposes, be fundholders akin to those in the NHS. The Lord Chancellor is threatening to repeat the disastrous experience of fundholding in the National Health Service within the administration of justice.

20/95: For Immediate Release: 20 January 1995

MP DISMAYED BY ROLLS ROYCE PULL-OUT FROM SCOTLAND

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, whose Pendle constituency contains the big Rolls Royce aero-engine plant at Barnoldswick, says he is stunned at the Company's decision to end its research and development work at East Kilbride in Scotland with the loss of 600 skilled engineering jobs. Reports suggest these could be transferred to Derby or Bristol.

The MP said: "It is impossible for me simply to ring-fence Barnoldswick and ignore what is happening elsewhere in the Company. We must all be deeply concerned about the implications of the decision."

"Last year, when I met representatives of the Rolls Royce Combine along with other Labour MPs with RR interests, we talked through the long list of their concerns. At the heart of it was the lack of consultation with the trade unions over the "downsizing" of the company and its overall corporate strategy. I know the unions have repeatedly raised the issue of the company's policy on take-overs and mergers and link-ups with companies such as BMW. We also discussed the implications of the creation of 'stand alone' corporate units such as RR Aero-Engine Services and Rolls Royce Civil Engines."

"Underpining all this concern is the total lack of support from a Government which has criminally ignored the needs of the aerospace industry. The Government failed to respond adequately to the Trade and Industry Select Committee report on the aerospace industry and even today there is no document in existence setting out the Government's strategy for supporting this key, leading edge industry on which thousands of highly skilled jobs depend."

"I shall be discussing these developments next week with my colleagues.

21/95: For Immediate Release: 23 January 1995

BAN VEAL CRATES NOW says MP

There should be a European wide ban on the use of veal crates according to local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says the controversy has swollen his postbag enormously.

The MP was speaking at Westminster following the publication of Labour's new policy on the transport of animals. Prentice said: "We have always taken animal welfare seriously and the transport of livestock for slaughter is one of the key animal welfare issues of the moment. It is simply inexplicable and quite appalling that the Liberal spokesperson has come out in support of the continuation of live veal calf exports."

"During the first half of the 1990s there has been a massive increase in the number of livestock animals being exported abroad for slaughter or further fattening. Meanwhile the number of British slaughterhouses has been in steep decline. The transport of livestock for slaughter is bad for the welfare of the animal, but it is also bad for the rural economy. When we export animals for slaughter we are exporting British jobs."

"Last year public opposition to the trade forced the main ferry companies to cease carrying livestock abroad and we are now faced with the spectacle of calves being flown to mainland Europe to be raised in the crate system, a system so cruel that it

was banned in this country five years ago, and non passenger ferries being chartered specifically to ship live animals abroad. Meanwhile the Government simply uses the European Union as an excuse for hand wringing inaction."

"The Opposition has brought forward a whole raft positive policies to change a system which causes outrage to the general public. Our document outlines a policy for action not excuses."

Note to Editors: Labour's main proposals are:

- a European maximum journey time for animals for slaughter of 8 hours;

• a redefinition of farm animals under the Treaty of Rome from 'Agricultural Products' to 'Sentient Beings';

• a system of licensing for all livestock transporters which allows the authorities to withdraw the license if the transporter were convicted of animal transport regulations offences, Labour would also ensure that companies and individuals found guilty of animal cruelty offences would not be issued with a license to export live animals on charter ships or aircraft;

• a requirement for training for those who handle live animals for transport as a licence condition;

• stronger enforcement of animal transport rules lor those transporters moving animals across Europe;

• the co-operation of the meat industry through bodies such as the Meat and Livestock Commission and Food From Britain in ways of promoting meat exports and the development of British veal production for export;

• an European wide ban on veal crates;

• an end to the export of British animals to be raised in systems that are illegal in the UK;

• the maintenance of the ban on export of live horses for slaughter under the Minimum Values Order.

22/95: For Immediate Release: 24 January 1995

MP WELCOMES CHANGES IN CSA

The changes to the operation of the Child Support Agency, announced yesterday, have been welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The Government plans include the introduction of an appeals system and will, for the first time, recognise “clean-break” settlements. No maintenance order will in future exceed 30% on net income.

The MP said: “The Opposition has been arguing for radical changes ever since the full horrors of the operation of the CSA became clear to everybody. The Government is now implementing the very changes which were rejected not many months ago by Tory MPs serving on the on the Social Security Select Committee.”

“The administration of the CSA has been absolutely chaotic. It has had a devastating impact on the lives of many people here in Pendle.”

23/95: For Immediate Release: 24 January 1995

DISABILITY BILL “INADEQUATE” says PENDLE MP

The Government's new Disability Bill which comes before the Commons today will fail Britain's 6.5 million disabled people according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He dubbed the measure “hopelessly inadequate”.

The MP said: “Until last year the Government even refused to acknowledge that discrimination against disabled people existed. They have certainly moved some way since but the proposals still fall woefully short of the comprehensive and enforceable civil rights disabled people so desperately need and deserve.”

“The Bill doesn’t say anything about improving access for disabled people to the means of transport. What is the use of an accessible railway station if you are still unable to use the train? “The Bill should outlaw discrimination in education, on the same basis as any other service provision yet education establishments are only mentioned in the list of exclusions to new access measures!”

“The Bill makes no mention of discrimination in the renting and purchase of property. It is full of half measures and unenforceable proposals.”

Note to Editors:
The Bill sets up a National Disability Council. But without a Commission disabled people will be left high and dry. Individuals will be left fighting the legal system alone and without the support of legal aid. The Government have only offered a monitoring agency and an unaccountable talking shop. What disabled people need is a properly funded, effective and powerful enforcement agency which can investigate discrimination, take up cases and enforce the law.

Definition of Disability. The Government's definition is inadequate confused and confusing. Reinforcing negative attitudes and public perceptions, the definition excludes many of the people who experience disability discrimination most strongly.

Employment. The Government proposes the abolition of the Quota. This will actually take away existing rights from disabled people before we have seen the effect of any new proposals. And the Government's new employment rights will only apply to firms employing 20 or more people. 96.4% of businesses currently employ less than 20 people; small businesses are the fastest growing sector of the economy.

Access to Goods & Services. Whilst claiming to seek the abolition of discrimination in the provision of goods and services the Government's own examples of, "alternative means" of provision merely illustrate the extent to which they have failed to comprehend the very nature of discrimination faced by disabled people.

The definition of disability in the Government's Bill has been called "Inadequate, Confused and Confusing" (MIND)

The Bill's definition of disability reinforces negative attitudes, whilst excluding many of the people who experience disability discrimination most strongly. In order to qualify for protection under the new law an individual has to show that he or she has a major restriction on their life stemming from an impairment.

The Government proposes a person is disabled if he or she
".. has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to day activities."

Whilst this is an adequate starting point, the (Private Members) Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill extends beyond this to take into account the stigma attached to individuals which can be responsible for restricting people's lives, and can do so in the absence of any actual disability by including those with a "history or reputation"

of disability. This is the definition that has been successfully employed by legislation in Australia, America and New Zealand.

The Government's Bill excludes many people who face disability discrimination. They have, therefore, had to include a highly convoluted and ambiguous schedule to explain additional cases who will be deemed to be disabled.

Nevertheless many people suffering from discrimination will still be excluded from all the legislation. For example, people with histories of mental health problems will only be able to claim legal protection against the discrimination which they so frequently face if they can show that they have not recovered from their breakdown.

24/95: **EMBARGOED: 26 January 1995**

ST JOSEPH'S ROW HITS THE COMMONS

The row between St Joseph's Parish Centre and Liberal led Pendle Council took a new turn today (Thursday) when local MP, Gordon Prentice, tabled an Early Day Motion on the affair in the House of Commons.

The MP said: "I was in touch with the Council before Christmas to urge it to lift its absurd 10.30pm curfew on the Centre's New Year's Eve Party but by efforts to help Father Reid and his parishioners were spurned. My appeal for reason went in one ear and out the other.

"I am pretty sure Councillor Whipp and his Liberal colleagues on Pendle Council will now wish to think again. Their decisions make them a laughing stock."

Note to Editors: The following Early Day Motion appears on the order paper of the Commons today:

"That this House condemns the petty, eccentric and killjoy actions of the Liberal led Pendle Council in wrecking plans by St Joseph's Parish Centre in Barnoldswick for a New Year's Eve Party by insisting the celebrations end at 10.30pm and notes the further lunacy insisted on by Liberal Councillor David Whipp that the Centre's curtains be drawn at 7pm summer and winter; notes the Centre is open to everyone in the local community, Catholic and non Catholic alike; applauds the valiant efforts of St Joseph's Church in raising funds to get the Centre off the ground in the first place; supports the attempts by Father Paul Reid and hundreds of his parishioners to force a re-think by Pendle Council and a return to commonsense by lifting the 10.30pm curfew on Friday and Saturday nights and by allowing the users of the Centre to open and close their curtains as and when they choose; and, furthermore, calls upon the Leader of the Liberal Democrats and hon members from his Party to repudiate the actions of Councillor Whipp who has confessed to the local press that he is the nasty little person responsible for the difficulties affecting St Joseph's Parish Centre."

25/95: For Immediate Release: January 1995
not used

26/95: For Immediate Release: 30 January 1995

MP TO MEET ROLLS ROYCE WORKERS

The implications of shock announcement ten days ago that 600 skilled jobs are to be lost at Rolls Royce with the closure of the design engineering facility at East Kilbride in Scotland are to be discussed at a meeting this Thursday at the House of Commons.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining other MPs who have Rolls Royce plants in their areas and Rolls Royce shop stewards from around the country in a desperate bid to save jobs in the firm.

When the news of the closure broke, local MP, Gordon Prentice, whose Pendle constituency contains the big Rolls Royce aero-engine plant at Barnoldswick, said he was stunned at the Company's decision to end its research and development work at East Kilbride. The MP said it was impossible simply to ring-fence Barnoldswick and ignore what was happening elsewhere."

"Last year, when I met representatives of the Rolls Royce Combine along with other Labour MPs with RR interests, we talked through the long list of their concerns. At the heart of it was the lack of consultation with the trade unions over the "downsizing" of the company and its overall corporate strategy. I know the unions have repeatedly raised the issue of the company's policy on take-overs and mergers and link-ups with companies such as BMW. We also discussed the implications of the creation of 'stand alone' corporate units such as RR Aero-Engine Services and Rolls Royce Civil Engines."

Note to Editors: The MP has criticized what he alleges is the total lack of support from a Government which has "criminally ignored" the needs of the aerospace industry. He said the Government failed to respond adequately to the Trade and Industry Select Committee report on the aerospace industry and "even today there is no document in existence setting out the Government's strategy for supporting this key, leading edge industry on which thousands of highly skilled jobs depend."

27/95: For Immediate Release: 30 January 1995

PENDLE MP SLAMS "TORY SLEAZE"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed the decision of ex Conservative Minister, Lord Wakeham, to join the merchant bank, N. M. Rothchilds. He said the peer's new job perfectly illustrated the "brazen indifference of the Tory top brass to public opinion".

"Lord Wakeham isn't any old Tory politician. He was at the very heart of the Government's privatisation drive as former Secretary of State for Energy and then Leader of the House of Commons. He is joining the board of N. M. Rothschild & Sons Ltd just six months after he was in the cabinet. He was previously responsible for the privatisation of the Regional Electricity Companies (RECs) - which N. M. Rothschilds were advisers on."

The MP continued: "N. M. Rothschilds have been major beneficiaries of the privatisation programme. Since 1981 they have acted as underwriters for the government and financial advisers for either the government or the company being sold on 17 occasions."

"Lord Wakeham joins Norman Lamont MP on the board of Rothschilds and a select group of 5 other top Tories who have joined the boards of companies which they

helped to privatise. They are Norman Tebbit, Lord Walker, Norman Fowler, Lord Young and John McGregor. The whole thing is totally corrupt. It is something crying out to be investigated by the Nolan Committee on Standards of Conduct in Public Life."

Note to Editors: Rothchilds were involved in the following privatisations: In 1981: Amersham, Cable & Wireless 1982; Britoil. 1984; BT. 1985; Britoil. 1986; British Gas. 1987; Royal Ordinance, BA, BM, Rolls-Royce. 1987; BP, British Steel. 1989; Water Companies. 1990; the RECs. 1991; BT. 1993; Northern Ireland Electricity. 1994 British Coal.

The controversy over privatisation has produced a cascade of revelations. The Chief Executive of Powergen has enjoyed a pay rise of over 275% compared to the chairman of the pre-privatisation CEGB; together with an additional £875,000 worth of share options last year.

Tory Sleaze

Cedric Brown, the Chairman of British Gas who was awarded a 75% pay rise last year, admitted that "it could have been handled better".

Despite all this the government have consistently refused to act on any of the proposals Labour has made. In fact he Tories only proposal has been that junior ministers should be paid more (Peter Lilley 25,1 94) - presumably so that they will not be tempted to leave for their boardrooms before the next election.

Conservative links with the Boardroom. Many Tory M.Ps have strong links to the privatised industries. The most recent edition of the Register of Members' Interests (Jan 1994) lists the following MPs as having links to the privatised utilities: Andrew Bowden is a consultant to Southern Water, lan Bruce is an adviser to the BT managers association, Simon Coombs is a consultant to BT, Tristan Garel-Jones is an adviser to British Gas, Andrew Hargreaves is a consultant to Midlands electricity, Sir Michael Marshall has BAE and Cable & Wireless as clients, Tim Rathbone is a consultant to Seeboard, Sir Giles Shaw is a director of Yorkshire water, and Sir Malcolm Thornton is a consultant to North West water. Many other Tor,v MPs work for lobbying companies which represent the privatised utilities.

Bankers gain from Privatisation The government has consistently refused to answer how much a particular company might have received for work undertaken on the sale of a public company, claiming that it is a matter of commercial confidentiality. But Labour's analysis of available figures has revealed that the scale of the city gravy train for privatisation expenses is staggering - the sale of the privatised utilities has involved costs totalling £1.2 billion. Of this N. M. Rothschild & Sons received some £6.6 million for advising on the sale of British Gas and another £6 million for advising on the sale of B.P. It is not known how much they received for advising the government on the sale of the water companies and the Regional Electricity Companies.

The Opposition has been joined by the Institute of Directors in pressing for the full disclosure of the remuneration of directors and their share options in company accounts. Under present regulations only the total remuneration and that of the chairman and highest paid director has to be disclosed. The CBI has also set up a committee of inquiry. Specifically Labour has proposed that:

•Shareholders should elect remuneration committees to decide on boardroom pay, with people who are not members of the board included. •The pay of each member of the board should be put as a separate item to company AGMs for shareholder approval. •Pension funds should vote at company AGMs on issues of executive pay. •Executive share options should be subject to income tax. •Privatised industry regulators should have new powers to cut prices where he or she thinks that the boardroom perks are excessive.

28/95: For Immediate Release: 30 January 1995

MP RE-ELECTED TO CHAIR KEY LABOUR COMMITTEE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been re-elected chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Backbench Environment Committee. The Committee has a wide-ranging brief which includes local government, planning and countryside issues.

The MP said: "I am delighted to have been re-elected by my colleagues to chair this Committee which has so many topical and controversial issues to consider. We have been looking at the Government's proposals to reorganise the local authority map although we are still waiting to hear what the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, has in mind for Lancashire."

"Given all the publicity locally about Pendle Council's unsuccessful bid for money from the Government's 'Single Regeneration Budget' I am keen for our Committee to examine the whole thing is some detail. I have also been tabling a series of Parliamentary Questions in the hope the answers will shed some light on the decision making process and the relative strengths of the other bids."

29/95: For Immediate Release: 1 February 1995

MP HAILS VICTORY ON FARM WAGES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the U turn by the Government on the future of the Agricultural Wages Board which was down for abolition.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "North East Lancashire has some of the lowest wages in Britain. The abolition in 1993 of the other Wages Councils - covering employees in traditional low pay areas such as catering and hairdressing - has driven wages down to poverty levels and below. The fact that the Government has backed down on farm wages is great news."

Note to Editors: After eighteen months of campaigning by Labour and the Rural, Allied and Agricultural Workers group of the TGWU union, the Government finally removed their threat to abolish the Agricultural Wages Boards on 20 December 1994.

The Agricultural Wages Boards (AWBs) for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland set legal minimum levels of pay and conditions for agricultural workers. At the beginning of July 1993 the Government issued a Consultative Document on the future of the Agricultural Wages Boards, accompanied by a letter stating that the Government wanted to eliminate statutory wage controls.

Support for the Boards. The consultation on the fate of the Boards was a real eye-opener for the Government: • By the consultation deadline, extended to November 1993, there were 3,628 submissions made - including 14 signed petitions in support of the Boards. The total number of responses against the Boards was just 15. 113 Parish Councils, 12 colleges and 27 Clergy wrote in support of the Agricultural Wages Boards. • The farmers' unions were all publicly opposed to the abolition of the AWBs.

The 1993 London School of Economics report commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture has shown that the minimum wages have had no adverse effect on agricultural employment levels.

There is one bitter note. The UK was signatory to two conventions of the International Labour Organisation the terms of which were satisfied by the existence of the AWBs. The Government announced in July 1994 that it was denouncing both conventions.

30/95: For Immediate Release: 1 February 1995

KASHMIR KILLINGS CONDEMNED BY AMNESTY

Security forces in India's Jammu and Kashmir state have illegally executed hundreds of men, women and children since 1990 and routinely tortured suspected Moslem separatists according to Amnesty International yesterday. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said the Amnesty report confirmed what everyone knew to be true.

The MP said: “I have many constituents who are desperately worried about what is happening in Kashmir. They have relatives there or have other close ties. I have seen the most compelling evidence of human rights abuses and I have been pressing the British Government to raise the issue in the United Nations.”

The human rights watchdog in a report issued at the start of the annual session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, said India was one of five persistent offenders against which the commission had needed to take action this year. It named the others as Turkey, Indonesia, Algeria and Colombia.

India rules part of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, gripped by a five-year secessionist rebellion, and one-third is ruled by Moslem Pakistan.

31/95: For Immediate Release: 2 February 1995

BUZZ OFF! says PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for a ban on low flying military aircraft over urban areas.

The MP’s demand came after he had received reports of up to eight RAF tornados streaking across the skies over Barnoldswick and Earby last Monday at 6.15pm. The strike aircraft then disappeared over the horizon.

The MP says: “This is simply not on. These planes arrive arrive at the speed of light out of nowhere, creating a tremendous din and startling people. There is absolutely no need for these low flying exercises over built up areas.”

"I have asked the Defence Secretary where these planes came from and why I was not informed about the exercise beforehand which is the custom and practice. I also want to know the height these planes were flying at and who picks up the tab for any damage they cause."

"I am not prepared to have populated areas of my constituency used as target practice in mock battles."

32/95: For Immediate Release: 2 February 1995

MP PLEDGES BACKING FOR ROLLS ROYCE WORKERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing action to save 600 highly skilled aero-engine design jobs which are threatened by the proposed closure of the Rolls Royce plant at East Kilbride in Scotland. He was speaking at Westminster following a meeting with union officials and shop stewards from the plant.

East Kilbride has been centrally involved in the design of the 700 series of engines, developed as part of the joint venture with BMW in Germany.

The MP said: "The people at East Kilbride fear that the closure of the plant and the loss or transfer of jobs to Derby and Bristol would inevitably mean delays and slippage to the programme which would damage the success of the joint venture. They are also shocked at the impact of the job losses on their immediate area and to the Scottish economy."

"I shall certainly be pressing for an early meeting with the company and with the President of the Board of Trade whose record on aerospace matters has been lamentable."

"The people whose jobs are on the line are not making leather belts. They are highly skilled design engineers. If the team is broken up and thrown to the winds, Scotland will suffer but Rolls Royce elsewhere in the UK will not escape unscathed."

"Clearly, the company's overall strategy will have a bearing on the future of the jobs in my own constituency at Barnoldswick."

Note to Editors: The company - BMW/Rolls Royce - is 51% owned by BMW and 49% owned by Rolls Royce.

33/95: For Immediate Release: 7 February 1995

MP BACKS SECURITY OF TENURE FOR TENANT FARMERS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has voted against the Agriculture Tenancies Bill which came before the Commons earlier this week. Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "If the Bill becomes law all future agricultural tenancies granted in England and Wales will be Farm Business Tenancies. A Farm Business Tenancy is one where a tenant farmer and his family have no legal right to security of tenure. That is reason enough to oppose this measure.

"A tenanted farm is not just a source of income, it is home for the farmer and his or her family. Farming is more than a business - it is a way of life. Under this legislation

there is no long term future for the family farm in the tenanted sector in England and Wales. Labour supports the family farm: owner-occupied and tenanted family farms. Security of tenure is essential for the family farm.

“The free-for-all which this Bill seeks to create in the letting of agricultural land will result in the fragmentation of farms. Instead of letting complete farms, landowners will let the fields, the farm buildings, and the farmhouse separately. The Bill will give big landowners greater flexibility and enhanced capital values. The price will be insecure tenants, and long term damage to our farm structure.

“I do not believe that this Bill will help new entrants establish themselves in farming. Most people have to borrow money to enter farming. That requires long term security. The Bill does nothing to halt the sale of county council small holdings which should provide a route into farming. Nor does it tackle quotas which are a block to new entrants, especially in the dairy sector.

“There are some elements in this Bill which can be supported, including the provision for full compensation for tenants improvements. However, I am totally opposed to the central purpose of the Bill - the creation of short term farm business tenancies to replace the traditional lifetime agricultural tenancy.

Farm tenancies

Labour has always supported security of tenure for tenant farmers and their families.”

Note to Editors: Landowners have long argued against legislation which gives security to agricultural tenants. In recent years they have won increased support for the argument that current legislation has had the effect of deterring landlords from letting farms which become vacant. The campaign for major legislation to deregulate the landlord-tenant system has been encouraged by the government and supported by Conservative Members of Parliament.

The Labour Party which has always supported the case for legislation which gives tenant farmers and their families security. We see this as an issue of social justice. It is also in the interests of the agricultural efficiency that there should be long-term rather than short-term tenancies: farming is a long term business. Short-term tenancies may have adverse consequences for the quality of the environment in the countryside.

Labour's Agriculture Act, 1947, and Agricultural Holdings Act, 1948, gave tenant farmers security of tenure. In 1976 the Labour Party enacted legislation which extended security of tenure to the extent of giving the son or daughter of a tenant farmer who earned his or her living from the holding a qualified statutory right to succeed. These succession provisions were strongly opposed by the landlords and the Conservative government's 1984 Agricultural Holdings Act abolished succession for all new lettings.

A whole range of policy changes should make it easier for people to get into farming. The days when it was Labour Party policy to encourage the growth of larger farms are over. We want as many people as possible to be able to earn a decent living from the land.

It has got more difficult to enter the industry in recent years. A “young farmer” in Pendle is close to 50. The development of quotas under the CAP has made it harder

for young people to become dairy farmers. We suggest that dairy quotas should be transferred at no initial cost from a national quota pool to new entrants. They could return the quota after ten years by which time they should have made sufficient profit to buy quota in the market place. A similar arrangement could apply to sheep and suckler cow quotas.

The Labour Party has always been happy that the British Government refused to implement the CAP retirement scheme for farmers. We would like to see the scheme changed to remove the link with farm structure and amalgamation. Given that small UK farms are large by continental standards, there is a case for pensioning off old farmers provided they make way for their son or daughter or another person to take over the farm.

Labour believes that we should look again at the tax arrangements for farm land. There is no doubt that some abuse is taking place and wealthy individuals are buying up farm land to reduce their tax liability. Labour is

Farm tenancies

looking at how we can create fiscal arrangements which will encourage landowners to let their land under the traditional system of lifetime tenancies.

To get a start in farming requires a large amount of capital, tremendous commitment and a great deal of hard work. The government have just announced that they intend to introduce a significant tax relief on tenanted agricultural land. On 27 January 1995 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that he is to table amendments to this year's Finance Bill. The government propose that the 100 per cent relief from Inheritance Tax which applies to owner-occupied land in agricultural use be extended to the agricultural value of land comprised in new tenancies granted after 1 September 1995.

34/95: For Immediate Release: 7 February 1995

MP SLAMS PRIME MINISTER OVER TEACHERS' PAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, fired a broadside across the Prime Minister's bows at Question Time today - two days before the report of the Teachers' Pay Review Body is published with recommendations for classroom pay for the year ahead.

The MP asked the Prime Minister who was speaking for the Government - the Education Secretary, Gillian Shepherd, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The MP said: "We know from a leaked memo published in the Times Educational Supplement on 20 January, that the Education Secretary believes a pay increase for teachers will lead to the loss of between 7,000 and 10,000 teaching jobs and big increases in class sizes - unless the award is fully funded by the Government. And at lunchtime today, I heard the Chancellor tell the BBC's *World at One* there was no extra cash available and, in any event, it wasn't needed!"

"Who on earth is speaking for the Government? And who speaks for the children in our schools?"

The MP said afterwards: "I have had an enormous volume of mail about this issue. People in Pendle are deeply worried about what is happening to our schools."

Note to Editors: Local education authorities are facing the toughest year yet. The Government's cuts of up to £800 million in planned expenditure on education will inevitably lead to larger class sizes and a fall in standards. The Government has admitted that its cuts will cause chaos. Education Secretary Gillian Shephard predicted that class sizes would "shoot up" and that there would be many teacher redundancies.

Local education authorities have only been given a 0.5 % increase in their budgets for 1995/6. In real terms this amounts to a cut of 2.4%.

Lancashire LEA education committee report stated that they were looking for cuts of up to £19 million from its budget. Press reports have shown that Shropshire LEA is facing a shortfall of £14 million, Cornwall £6 million cut from education spending, Gloucestershire £9.5 million and Warwickshire

£9.3 million. The Government has also cut £20 million from school effectiveness grants, £13 million in the planned inspection budget and have abandoned the Reading Recovery programme.

The Government has allowed LEAs only one fifth of what they need to build new schools and repair existing buildings. It is estimated that there is a backlog of £4 billion of repairs to school buildings.

65 local education authorities will not even be able to spend enough to fund a teachers pay increase in line with inflation from their Standard Spending Assessment increase for education in 1995-6.

Local education authorities are going to have to cut back on discretionary grants for students. Figures for further education in 1992/3 reveal that 25 local authorities made no discretionary awards to 16-18 year olds, 18 made less than 10%. 69 LEAs gave discretionary awards to less that 10% to over 19 year olds.

Standards in education are under threat with the cuts. The results of the Standard Assessment Tests show that a third of 14 year olds are not mastering basic English, maths and science. A survey by the Basic Skills Unit has revealed that one in six adults has severe difficulty with literacy and numeracy. Those educated in the 1960s and 1970s fared better than those taught in the 1980s.

OECD figures show how badly our pupils are faring in comparison with our competitors. In Japan 80 per cent of pupils obtain the equivalent of an A-level, 68 per cent in Germany, 48 per cent in France but in England only 29 per cent succeed. In France 66 per cent of 16 year olds gain the equivalent of a GCSE in maths, the national language and science in 1990/91, in Germany 62 per cent, in Japan 50 per cent and in England only 27 per cent.

Over a million of our primary school children are being taught in classes of over 30. The percentage of children in classes of over 30 has risen from 25.4% in 1991 to 28.2% in 1994.

Leaked Letter Before the budget settlement Gillian Shephard warned her Cabinet colleagues, in a leaked letter, that if the budget settlement for education authorities was not enhanced and teachers pay went up by 2-3 per cent "schools would need to find resources equivalent to the loss of 7,000 -10,000 teaching posts to fund it. This

further tightening of staffing ratios would mean class sizes would shoot up". The Secretary of State was incapable of winning the necessary increase in funding for education.

In the leaked letter Gillian Shephard looked forward to a "period of calm" in classrooms. She then said "all this is now be in immediate danger if we now offer teachers either a provocatively low settlement, or acceptable pay levels only at the cost of sharp increases in class sizes."

Teachers Pay Sixty five Local Education Authorities (LEAs) will not even be able spend enough to fund a teachers pay increase in line with inflation from their Standard Spending Assessment increase for education in 95-96.

Figures compiled from parliamentary questions and Government statistics show the total SSA increase for LEAs in England is £86 million short of the

sum needed to pay for a 2.9% pay rise alone. This is before a penny has been spent on other commitments such as special educational needs, books, increased pupil numbers and adult education, which will all lose out as a result of the Government's meagre 0.5% allocation to LEAs.

It would cost an extra £283,857,000 to fund a 2.9% increase in pay for 1995/96. The Government has only allowed local education authorities to spend an extra £198m in SSAs on education in the same financial year - £85.8m less than the cost of funding the teachers pay rise alone.

The shire counties will be the worst affected. They will have to make up £63,375,000 million from cuts. Northumberland had £1.9m cut from its SSA but it will cost the county £3.5m to fund the pay rise. Essex had £1.4m cut from its SSA, its extra pay bill will be £8.5m - a shortfall of £9.9 million.

The metropolitan districts will have to make up £54,479,000. St Helens had £3.7 million cut from its SSA, its extra pay bill will be £1.2m. Birmingham had £1.3m cut: its extra pay bill will be £6.9m - a shortfall of £8. 1 million.

Standard Spending Assessment per pupil Figures from the Department for Education on the average SSA per pupil in primary and secondary schools clearly show that the cuts will hit hard. The average SSA for secondary school pupils was £2,724 in 1992-3, in 1995-6 it is £2,635 down 3.27% or £89.

According to the Times Educational Supplement (27.1.95) LEAs will on average have to make a cut, from last year, of £50 per primary school pupil and £194 per secondary school pupil.

The education cuts - by Gillian Shephard's own admission - are going to mean that class sizes will shoot up and thousands of teachers jobs will be lost. The cuts will mean larger class sizes for every pupil, in every classroom, in every school in the country. Pupils with special educational needs will not receive the services they need.

35/95: For Immediate Release: 8 February 1995

MP PRESSES FOR ACTION ON SCHOOL TOILETS

The state of school toilets in Lancashire is absolutely appalling according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He was speaking during yesterday's late night adjournment debate on education funding in Lancashire, secured by his colleague and next door neighbour, Burnley MP Peter Pike.

The MP said: "Peter was drawing attention to the dreadful state of some school toilets in Burnley and I could not let the reference pass without pointing to the situation in Pendle which, I have to say, is just as bad."

"I do not blame Lancashire County Council which bid for over £40m to bring its educational buildings up to scratch and the Government gave it permission to spend just over £8m."

"Clearly, the County Council has to work out its priorities and - as far as toilet blocks are concerned - it seems there must be a hazard to health before remedial work is undertaken. I mentioned Laneshawbridge Primary School in Pendle which has been trying to get new toilets for ages."

"Many of Lancashire's schools are ancient and decrepit and they need a lot of money spent on them. That is a simple fact of life which the Government is closing its eyes to."

36/95: For Immediate Release: 8 February 1995

OUTLAW DISABLED DISCRIMINATION. DEMANDS LOCAL MP

Pendle MP,Gordon Prentice, today launched a campaign aimed at improving access for local disabled people to arts and sports venues. The MP also called on local disabled people to make sure they were not missing out on funding from the new National Lottery, which will make its first grants to good causes at Easter.

The MP said that disabled people were still denied adequate access to many theatres, cinemas, concert halls, museums and libraries, and did not have adequate facilities within these buildings.

"Last year Government funding cuts forced the Arts Council to close its excellent Disability Arts Unit, although it cost only £50,000 a year to run. On the sporting front, I am concerned that recent Government proposals to restructure the Sports Council fail even to mention disabled people. At the same time the Council has been told to wind up the 'Sport for All' programme, which has been so successful at getting disabled people involved in sport."

"As part of a nationwide campaign we are running on this issue, I would like to be told of any instances of discrimination against local disabled arts and sports fans. If you or a disabled friend or relation have been refused access to a local cinema, football ground, concert hall or any similar building, please write to me at the House of Commons, London SWlA OAA" .

Turning to the Lottery, the MP said: "To be eligible for funding from the Lottery, local arts, sport and heritage groups will need to demonstrate that their projects are accessible to disabled people. I urge local organisations in these areas to work closely with disabled groups in drawing up their applications for Lottery grants, and get their bids in quickly~.

37/95: For Immediate Release: 8 February 1995

"IT'S A GRAVE MATTER" says MP

The National Association of Funeral Directors is urging local MP, Gordon Prentice, to step into the row over Government plans to limit funeral payments, which are paid through the Social Fund, to £875. People with very limited means can apply to the Social Fund for help with the cost of what the Fund describes as "a simple funeral".

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I am in touch with the Secretary of State for Social Security to find out more about the big regional variations in the cost of funerals which the Funeral Directors draw special attention to. I want to know what estimates the Government has made of the regional variations in the cost of a new grave and in the overall cost of a funeral here in the North West and elsewhere."

"The death of a loved one is a traumatic experience for relatives and others. Having to worry about the cost of the funeral is something people can do without. The funeral payment should obviously be pitched at a realistic level."

Note to Editors: The National Association of Funeral Directors wrote to the MP as follows: "The Rt Hon Peter Lilley, MP, Secretary of State for Social Security has recently announced his intention to "cap" funeral payments by the Social Services Fund in respect of funerals at £875. This figure is not realistic, and will cause bereaved families even more distress and grief when called upon to justify costs in excess of this figure. Apart from the vast gulf nationwide in cemetery fees which range from £200 to well in excess of £1,000 in some areas, there is a whole range of special needs which would increase costs. For example, out-of-hours and week-end removals, excess weight/ size/height of deceased requiring special coffin specification and different sized grave, pacemaker removal, etc., all of which contribute to higher costs - costs over which neither the funeral director nor the bereaved family have any control. There are also parochial fees, religious services and particular religious requirements, plus other basic fee requirements (doctors' certificates etc). All of these have a significant impact on even the most "basic" and "simple" funeral...."

38/95: For Immediate Release: 10 February 1995

MP CALLS FOR ANONYMITY IN RAPE CASES

The names of people charged with rape should not be published in the press or broadcast in the media says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the "cloak of anonymity" should be preserved until a person is found guilty by the Courts.

The MP's call follows a series of rape cases where the name and address of the alleged rapist had been printed in the press only for the charge to be subsequently withdrawn by the alleged victim.

The MP said: "There have been cases locally that have concerned me greatly. A person's reputation can be blown to smithereens and his livelihood wrecked. Yet there seems to be no redress. The irony, of course, is that the name of the complainant is anonymous - and I have absolutely no quarrel with that whatsoever. Home Office Ministers have told me they have no plans to change the law although it seems plain to me that terrible injustices can be done to innocent people."

“I understand the argument that is sometimes put forward that rape is no different from any other serious crime. If we have anonymity for those accused of rape then why shouldn’t anonymity be extended to those charged with murder, arson or whatever else?”

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP asked the Home Secretary: ”if he will take steps to ensure that the names and addresses of persons charged with the offence of rape are not published in the press or in the broadcast media unless and until those persons are found guilty.” The Home Office Minister, David Maclean MP, replied: “I am satisfied that the present law, which affords anonymity for complainants in sexual offence cases but offers no special protection for defendants in such cases, strikes a proper balance between the principle of open justice on one hand and the need to ensure that victims of sexual offences come forward on the other. I therefore have no plans to alter the law in this area.”

39/95: For Immediate Release: 10 February 1995

TV CHIEFS TUNE INTO WEST CRAVEN

The campaign by local MP, Gordon Prentice, to get North West television beamed into homes in West Craven will get a further boost this week (wb Monday, 13 February) when Granada TV engineers check out the TV sets of people living in Barnoldswick and Earby.

The engineers will test the strength of the signals transmitted into the area by Granada in the North West.

The MP said: “Since I started this campaign for better TV reception lots of local people have been in touch with me to express their frustration that they cannot pick up BBC North West or independent television and that everything comes beaming over from Leeds with news of what is happening on Humberside and in Lincolnshire! I have even had people deep in Ribble Valley contact me about problems they have with TV reception.”

“People who have been in touch with me have kindly allowed the engineers to check out their sets and aerials. I am in exactly the same boat as everyone else as I live in Barnoldswick and can only pick up Leeds.

The MP stressed: “I don’t want people to lose their Yorkshire TV as a price of getting North West programmes. I would like to see us getting both.”

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP secured the support of his colleagues in the North West Group of Labour MPs who are also lobbying the TV broadcasters for improvements in TV coverage.

40/95: For Immediate Release: 14 February 1995

POVERTY IS STAINING BRITAIN says PENDLE MP

There is a poverty crisis in Britain today according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, on the day the Labour Opposition mounts an onslaught on the Government's record, the MP said: "Millions are denied a share in the fruits of economic progress. Last week, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published its latest analysis of poverty in Britain, *Income and Wealth.* The report finds that inequality has continued to widen under the Tories, and that the 'trickle-down effect' is a myth. The solution to poverty and inequality lies in job creation to eliminate unemployment, and in a fairer distribution of wealth and opportunity."

"The gap between rich and poor is greater than at any time since the 1930s and the gap between the earnings of the highest-paid and those of the lowest paid workers is greater than at any time since records were first kept in 1886. That, in itself, is an astonishing fact".

"It was none other than the Tory Deputy Chairman, John Maples, who let the cat out of the bag a few months ago in his, now notorious, leaked report - the Maples Memorandum. He said *"The reality is now that the rich are getting richer on the hacks of the rest, who are getting poorer."*

The MP continued: "Between 1979 and 1992, the poorest 20-30 per cent of the population derived no benefit from economic growth; a fifth of the population lives in poverty; in 1979 it was under a tenth; the real incomes of the poorest 10 per cent **fell** by 17% between 1979 and 1991/2; those of the richest 10 per cent **rose** by 60 per cent; the poorest tenth pay 43% of incomes in tax; richest tenth pay only 32%; the top 1 per cent of the population (earning £120,000 or more) has received £75 billion in tax cuts since 1979 (an average of 300,000 each); the tax burden of the bottom ten per cent has **increased** by £3pw in the last ten years; 1 in 3 children live in a low-income family; in 1979 it was 1 in 10."

Note to Editors: The baby of an unskilled manual worker is 11/2 times more likely to die in the first year as the baby of a professional or manager the poorest children are twice as likely to die from a respiratory illness as a child from Social Class I in some of the poorest parts of Britain, death rates are now as high as they were 40 years ago the mortality ratio in the 10% most deprived electoral wards in the North is almost double that in the 10% least deprived unemployed men are 10-15 times more likely to attempt suicide than others .

UNEMPLOYMENT IN BRITAIN Mass unemployment hes been a feature of British society throughout 16 years of Tory Government. The former Chancellor, Norman Lamont, called it "a price worth paying", but it is not people like him who are paying it: it is the millions who have been forced onto benefits - and off benefits - and the millions of ordinary people whose taxes are paying the £24bn p.a. cost of unemployment.

The measurement of unemployment It is difficult to judge the true level of unemployment in Britain today. The Government promotes the **monthly claimant count,** which counts the number of people who are claiming an unemployment-related benefit in an unemployment benefit office. Its method of calculation has been changed 27 times since 1979, so it bears scant resemblance to the true level of unemployment. Among the changes which have already reduced the figures, or are about to come in, are: switch from register to claimant count (i 90,000 cut in October 1982) excluding unemployed people over 60 (170,000 cut April/June 1983) excluding unemployed school-leavers (200,000 cut summer 1983) excluding unemployed 16 & 17 year olds (90,000 cut September 1988) switch to Incapacity Benefit (200,000 will be cut from April 1995) switch to JobSeekers Allowance (90,000 will be cut from April 1996).

Real level of unemployment The other measurement - the Quarterly Labour Force Survey - is an International Labour Organisation (ILO) measure based on the number of people who: a) have done no paid work in the survey week; b) have looked for a job in the previous four weeks; c) are available to start a job in the next two weeks.

But this only tells half the story. Many more people have no job and want one, but are missing from official figures. This includes: people who are looking for work but are not available to start so soon because they have to rearrange family responsibilities - eg childcare, elderly care, sickness care; and people who have given up looking, because they don't think there are any jobs. This effectively doubles the unemployment totals to virtually five million'.

41/95: For Immediate Release: 14 February 1995

MP PUSHES FOR MORE RESEARCH ON MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing the Government to boost research into Multiple Sclerosis - a disabling condition that generally strikes young people.

The MP said: “There has been speculation in the press that “beta-interferons” - which are naturally occurring proteins - may hold out the possibility of successful treatment. I am anxious to know more about the trials.”

“I have constituents with MS whose lives have been turned upside down following the diagnosis. Homes have to be modified to cope with wheelchairs and a million and one other things have to be done.”

“The main agency through which the Government supports research is the Medical Research Council. Its spending on MS has been declining in recent years from £297,000 in 1987/8 to £64,000 in 1992/3. Given the high personal cost of this disabling condition to the people who fall victim to it - and the costs to the wider community - I am keen to establish why this should be the case.”

Note to Editors: It has been estimated that there are approximately 122 people with MS in Pendle. In the UK there are around 85,000 people with MS. It is the commonest potentially disabling condition in young adults.

42/95: For Immediate Release: 14 February 1995

MP TURNS UP THE PRESSURE ON NORTH WEST WATER CHIEF

An attempt by North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher, to justify his pay and perks has infuriated Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Sir Desmond was giving evidence this afternoon in front of MPs on the Employment Select Committee. Prentice said: “Sir Desmond Pitcher is one of the jackpot winners of privatisation. For running this monopoly he gets a third of a million every year. His salary is up 619% to £338,000 from his predecessors £47,000. He gets a pension contribution of £22,500 paid for by the company. He has over 200,000 share options which should net him at least £200,000 profit when he trades them in.”

“And what do we get for this King’s Ransom? In my constituency, we get leaky pipes and flooded neighbourhoods.”

The MP added: “The Prime Minister says it is no a matter for him. Well let me say this to Sir Desmond - an incoming Labour Government will tackle these boardroom excesses. There must be full disclosure of information in company accounts on all pay and perks and hand outs in the boardroom and among top directors. Remuneration committees must be opened up and made more representative and shareholders meetings should be reformed as part of changes in company law. And we need to tax executive share options as income.”

“Given the widening gulf between rich and poor, to do nothing about these excesses would be an insult to the 14 million people in Britain today who have less than £115 a week after housing costs to live on.”

Note to Editors: Five chairmen of regional water companies have made a million pounds out of privatisation 42 water directors hold £8 million worth of share option profit water directors each hold £200,000 worth of share option profit The Chairman of North West water has seen his salary increase by on average 619%% since privatisation Water companies have cut 9,000 jobs since privatisation and plan to cut another 1,800 jobs

North West Water

The executive share option scheme allows Directors and senior management to buy shares at an "option price" which can then be sold later at the then market price. The opportunity for making very large gains indeed is apparent. Today, NWW shares are trading at ***. Fortunes can be made by buying at a favourable price and selling later at a much higher price. (See Table on pages 32 and 33 of the Annual Report).

Executive Share Option Scheme

	Share options as at 31.3.93	Options granted during the year	Exercise price per share	First date exercisable
Sir Desmond Pitcher	-	162,338 54,112	462.0p 393.0p	5 July 96 5 July 98

43/95: For Immediate Release: 14 February 1995

MP DEMANDS INQUIRY ON LOW FLYING WARPLANES

Reports of eight RAF strike Tornados streaking across the skies over Barnoldswick and Earby on 30 January have been confirmed by the Ministry of Defence. The roof top skimming jets have infuriated local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says people are fed up with low flying military aircraft which can scare the living daylights out of people.

The MP said: “What is absolutely astonishing is the fact that two formations of four Tornados from RAF Bruggen in Germany were sent over here to buzz my constituency and then return to their base. There is absolutely no need for low flying over built up areas.”

“In Germany there is a general limit of 1,000ft but here in the UK it is 250ft and can be as low as 100ft in three specially designated districts in Scotland and Wales.”

“The whole thing is completely out of order.”

44/95: **To Nelson Leader** :For Immediate Release: 15 Feb 1995

CARRINGTON VIYELLA GOES UNDER THE HAMMER

Barrowford firm, Carrington Viyella, is to be sold to one of four possible buyers according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: “I gather that the parent company, Coates Viyella, intends to retain a 20% stake and that Carrington Viyella will be sold intact with no job losses. This has yet to be confirmed but I understand this is the shape of the proposal.”

“My concern is for the firm to continue and to prosper - with no job losses - and I hope the new buyer will be able to give me the assurances I seek.”

Last November, the press disclosed plans by Coates Viyella to raise £100 million through an auction of its basic textile manufacturing businesses. These businesses employ more than 5,000 people and had sales last year of £380m but operating profits were only £6m.

47/95: For Immediate Release: 16 February 1995

PENDLE JOBLESS SHARPLY UP

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit rose sharply last month to 2,497 (6.6%) from 2,295 in December 94.

1,930 men were looking for work (8.9%) and 567 women (3.6%). Vacancies were up at Nelson job Centre and slightly down at Colne.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “Last month I said I was keeping my fingers crossed that the fall in unemployment would be sustainable and that this would be the trend. Unfortunately, the jobless total here in Pendle is up again with a vengeance although it is still well below the figures we got used to at the height of the recession.”

48/95: For Immediate Release: 20 February 1995

MP CALLS FOR BLASPHEMY DEATH SENTENCE TO BE LIFTED

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is appealing to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, to intervene to prevent the death sentence placed on two Christians - 14 year old Salamat Masih and his uncle, Rehmat Masih, 40, who have been found guilty of blasphemy.

They were accused of scrawling graffiti insulting to the Prophet Mohammed on the wall of a mosque two years ago when the boy was 12. The MP is supporting a Commons motion calling for the death sentence to be lifted.

The MP said: “This death sentence on an illiterate young boy and his uncle surely cannot be allowed to stand. Prime Minister Bhutto says she is shocked and surprised but I appeal to her to act swiftly to save these two people from the gallows.”

“Benazir Bhutto has said she wants to see the law changed and that is to be welcomed. The High Commission here in Britain has pointed out that there have been no executions for blasphemy and that is reassuring. The death sentence for blasphemy is entirely inappropriate.”

Note to Editors: The Pakistan High Commission sent the following Press Release to the Pendle MP on 14 February 1995:

“Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has expressed shock and surprise over the pronouncement of death penalty against two Christians Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih by the District & Sessions Court in Lahore on 9 February 1995.

“About the Blasphemy Law, which was enacted during the tenure of the Martial Law government, the Prime Minister has said that her party intended to insert necessary amendments into the law. The matter is being discussed with the government's political allies and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has appealed to the opposition political parties to extend support to the government in this respect.

“The sentences against Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih have been passed by the Additional Sessions Judge. The defendants still have two rights of

appeal to the High Court and subsequently, if necessary, to the Supreme Court of Pakistan The fears expressed that Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih face execution in the near future are, therefore, totally unfounded.

“Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih have already filed an appeal in the Punjab High Court against the sentence passed by the Additional Judge on February 9, 1995. The High Court ha~ admitted the appeal for hearing. The admission of the appeal automatically stays the decision of the inferior court. The High Court will now deliberate on the case and then give its judgement. Till then no action can be taken on the sentence.

“Pakistan. For example, Gul Masih who was awarded the death sentence under the blasphemy law, was set free after the High Court quashed the sentence of a lower court.

“Depending on the judgement of the High Court the defendants would still have the right to appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan. It is, therefore, quite clear that the judicial process is far from exhausted in this particular case.

“The Government of Pakistan is fully aware of its responsibilities towards the minorities in the country. It is firmly committed to fulfilling its obligations to the principles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other human rights instruments. It will make every effort, within the requirements of the law and the Constitution, to protect and safeguard the fundamental human rights of all its citizens.

49/95: For Immediate Release: 21 February 1995

MP RENEWS CALL FOR BAN ON VEAL CRATES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for a ban on the use of veal crates. He was speaking at Westminster on the eve of a Commons adjournment debate, secured by Tory MP, Gary Streeter, on the export of live animals.

The MP said: “My postbag has been bulging with letters from concerned people from all across Pendle. Young people, especially, are really fired up about the issue. It won’t go away until we stop, once and for all, this barbaric trade.”

The MP added: “I know that many good people who have supported the Liberal Party through thick and thin are dismayed by the position taken by their rural affairs spokesperson, Paul Tyler MP. He told his local regional daily, the Western Mail, that if we didn’t export veal calves for their short and miserable lives in continental veal crates then others - notably the Eastern Europeans - would. That is supposed to justify continuing with this appalling trade!”

“In 1993 the UK exported some 2 million lambs and sheep and 500,000 young calves. Once animals get to Europe they enter a world where welfare standards - both during the journey and then at slaughter - are appallingly low.

“People who are working for the humane treatment of animals - such as Compassion in World Farming - have documented evidence that animals are frequently given neither food nor water, even during journeys of 30 hours or more.”

Note to Editors: The pressure group, Compassion in World Farming, adds: Last year World in Action followed a consignment of sheep transported from Somerset to southern France. The animals were given neither food nor water during the 28-hour journey. More recently pigs went for 37 hours without food or water on a journey from Britain to Portugal. Indeed, in a 1993 Report the European Commission admitted that the EC laws on feeding and watering animals in transit are "systematically flouted".

Ban Veal Crates now says MP

Unloading can be a brutal process on the continent with animals being beaten and kicked and the use of the electric goad being commonplace. In France sheep are sometimes dragged along by one front leg from the truck and into the slaughterhouse.

In the summer the combination of hot weather and poor ventilation can be lethal. Last July 400 British sheep were sent to Greece; 300 died during the journey from heat exhaustion. In its 1993 Report the European Commission concluded that "long distance transport in overstocked vehicles, combined with dehydration and starvation, results in very poor welfare and often in high mortality".

CIWF videos have shown that some Spanish abattoirs slaughter sheep without first stunning them. Lambs are just hung up by a rear leg. Then their throats are cut and they are left to bleed to death while fully conscious. Most of the animals involved will be slaughtered on, or soon after, arrival at their destination. CIWF believes that as long as people wish to eat meat, animals should be sent to a slaughterhouse as near as possible to the farm on which they have been reared. The meat can then be exported.

The European Commission's Scientific Veterinary Committee has echoed this approach stressing in a report that live transport "should be avoided whenever possible". They concluded that "the occurrence of poor welfare can be reduced considerably by slaughtering near the point of rearing and transporting meat".

The majority of calves exported from Britain end up in veal crates in Holland and France, a system so cruel that it has been banned in the UK since 1990. CIWF thinks it is wrong to send calves for rearing abroad in a system which has been outlawed at home.

The usual veal crate is a solid-sided wooden box. It is so narrow that from the age of two weeks the calves cannot even turn round. Indeed they cannot even stand up or lie down without difficulty. The calves remain in these conditions until they are slaughtered at the age of five months.

Another key problem in veal crate systems is the diet. Continental consumers prize the very pale meat known as "white veal". To achieve this the calves are fed throughout their lives on a completely unhealthy all-liquid diet. Professor John Webster of Bristol University, Britain's leading expert in dairy cattle welfare. has condemned this diet stating that "it completely distorts the normal development of the rumen", the calf's stomach system. In a desperate attempt to get solid food the calves lick the wooden boxes and swallow their own hair. The iron content is also kept extremely low in a further attempt to keep the flesh pale.

The majority of calves being exported are the male calves born to dairy cows. The calf is separated from the mother at the age of just one or two days old; this causes great distress to both animals. When they are about one week old the calves are taken to market. From there they will go by road to a seaport or airport. Once in Europe they will endure another road journey to the farm.

Ban Veal Crates now says MP

It is, moreover, completely unacceptable for tiny, week-old calves to be sent on long journeys to Europe, journeys which can last over 20 or even 30 hours. Research carried out by Trunkfield and Broom of Cambridge University's Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine concluded that "transport normally leads to poor welfare in calves". The researchers added that "The disturbance for the animal is psychological as well as physical and physiological. Calf welfare during transit may be very poor".

The legal position:

The Minister of Agriculture argues that the Treaty of Rome prevents the government from banning live exports. However, Article 36 of the Treaty allows a Member State to impose export restrictions on grounds of public morality, public policy or, amongst other things, the health of animals.

The government argues that it cannot rely on Article 36 because transport and the rearing of calves are "occupied fields", i.e. there are in force EC Directives dealing with these issues. Despite this, CIWF believes that there are a number of good legal arguments on which the government could rely if it wished to prohibit the export of calves to veal crates.

There is strong veterinary evidence that the EC Calves Directive is wholly inadequate in the protection it affords to calves (it sanctions the continued use of the crate). As such, it could be argued that the Directive fails properly to "occupy" the field and thus is not a bar to a UK calf exports ban.

b) Unusually for an EC Directive, the Calves Directive only imposes minimum standards; it expressly allows a Member State to maintain stricter standards.

50/95: For Immediate Release: 20 February 1995

MP TO TACKLE ROADS MINISTER OVER BY-PASS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be leading an all Party deputation from four local authorities to press the case for the trunking of the A56 and the construction of a single lane by pass around Colne and Foulridge.

The meeting with Roads and Railways Minister, John Watts, will take place next Monday (27 February) at the Department of Transport's London HQ at Marsham Street.

The MP said: "I have already had a very useful briefing meeting with members and officers from North Yorkshire and Lancashire County Councils and with Craven District as well as my own Council here in Pendle."

"We have a limited number of objectives and we shall all be singing from the same song sheet. Now that the M65 - M6 link is currently being built we must act now if we are to save ourselves from being engulfed in the increased traffic the new link generates. The figures the previous Roads Minister gave me (an extra 9,000 - 11,000 vehicles east of Colne) are being challenged right, left and centre and we want to give the Minister an opportunity to consider the evidence we have. Some estimates put the additional traffic at over 20,000 vehicles a day."

"Doing nothing is not an option."

51/95: For Immediate Release: 21 February 1995

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR BAN ON MAHOGANY IMPORTS

The import of mahogany from Brazil should be banned according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. He is supporting moves in the House of Commons to end the trade in this valuable hard wood.

Mahogany is one of the main tropical timbers traded in the UK, and the UK is the world's largest importer of Brazilian Mahogany. The MP said: "I am extremely concerned about the environmental effects of indiscriminate logging of mahogany. The environmental pressure group, Friends of the Earth, say they have evidence that logging companies are now moving into the protected areas of the forest and are logging illegally causing irreversible damage to the rainforest and its indigenous peoples."

"Friends of the Earth have calculated that he existing rates of exploitation and the activities of the logging companies are incompatible with the long term survival of

this species. We are losing species at an alarming rate. We've got to start saving the planet's genetic heritage and not, unthinkingly, wipe it out."

Note to Editors: The Commons Early Day Motion reads:

"That this House expresses its continued grave concern at the over-exploitation of, as well as the environmental and social devastation and illegal activities associated with the trade in, Brazilian mahogany, botanical name *Swietenia macrophylla,* and the consequential threat to the long-term survival of the rain forest and the indigenous peoples in Brazil; notes that the United Kingdom is the world's second largest importer of Brazilian mahogany and is, therefore, a contributor to this problem; further notes that in 1994 the British Government supported the listing of Brazilian mahogany under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, CITES, but that this proposal was not successful; and consquently calls upon her Majesty's Government to support the listing for Brazilian mahogany in Annex C2 of the European Union CITES Regulation No 3626/82 and to introduce a zero quota of imports from Brazil.

52/95: For Immediate Release: 20 February 1995

MP TO HEAR OBJECTIONS TO CHANNEL RAIL LINK ROUTE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be hearing evidence from hundreds of people affected by the line of the proposed route of the Channel Tunnel Rail link from the coast to London. The MP has been appointed to sit on the Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.

The MP said: "Hundreds of people living in Kent, Essex, North and East London, whose homes and properties are in the way of the rail link have petitioned Parliament and we must listen carefully to the points they make."

"The Channel Tunnel link is a colossally expensive undertaking. The whole thing is estimated to cost £2,873,000,000."

Note to Editors: ESTIMATE OF EXPENSE The Channel Tunnel Rail Link Works

Purchase of land, minerals and permanent rights including easements for works : £265,000,000
Station and station improvements, vehicle parks, maintenance and other depots, buildings (brick, concrete and steel) and associated works : £368,900,000
Railway works:-
Permanent ways
Tunnels including ventilation and drainage ; £900,800,000. Earthworks, including site clearance, drainage and landscaping works : £357,800,000
Bridges including viaducts and other structures : £199,900,000
Construction railways and other operational facilities; £28,100,000
Electrical and other equipment, feeders and distributors : £124,500,000
Signalling: £113,700.000
Roads, streets and paved areas (concrete or bituminous surface) bridges and other structures: £79,200,000. Sewers : £6,300,000. Pedestrian subways : £64,800,000
Diversion of watercourses and drains including protective works to river beds : £3,700,000
Diversion of overhead electric cables : £45,100,000. Diversion of gas pipelines : £2,700,000
Relocation of other services and facilities:-

Gas holders and associated gas pipelines: £24,400,000
Electricity mains : £23,600,000. Gas mains : £44,600,000. Sewers, foul and surface water : £5,800,(
Water supply mains and distribution: £5,400,000. Telecommunications equipment; £28,800,000
TOTAL: £2,873,000,000

53/95: For Immediate Release: 22 February 1995

PRENTICE CONDEMNS 17TH HIKE IN PRESCRIPTION CHARGES AS "A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed today's 50p hike in prescription charges which puts the cost up to £5.25p. The increase follows the earlier one last February which hiked prescription charges by 11.6% to £4.75. In March 1993 prescription charges were pushed up to £4.25 - then up by 13%.

Speaking at Westminster today the MP hit out at the increase which is three times greater than the rate of inflation. "The record shows that the increases in prescription charges is galloping ahead of inflation. There have been enormous increases year after year."

"Last year the pharmacists dubbed the increase a tax on illness and today's announcement has been roundly condemned by the BMA."

"This increase dwarfs the miserable 1% offered to the nurses.

"The Conservative record on health is enough to make anyone feel sick" said the MP.

ends

Note to editors: This is the 17th increase in prescription charges since 1979 when they stood at 20p

54/95: For Immediate Release: 23 February 1995

PENDLE IN GRIP OF HOUSING CRISIS says MP

"The housing crisis is hitting people all over Pendle" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "People are suffering from the Tory housing crisis. Homebuyers face the Government's interest rate increases, cuts in mortgage tax relief and having to pay for private insurance to take the place of Income Support. All this comes on top of lots of people already in mortgage arrears."

"Government policy means that Council and Housing Association tenants face rent increases two or three times the rate of inflation. All this on top of rents having doubled over the last few years."

"People are being made homeless. Others are overcrowded or living in places unfit for human habitation. Here in Pendle we have the oldest housing stock in the North West - a lot of it in dreadful condition. Yet this Government has cut house building back to its lowest level for 50 years."

"That has left building workers on the dole. Other people have lost their jobs because there is not enough demand for the bricks or carpets or cookers or electric wiring or lavatory pans that go into new homes."

"Labour believes we should build more homes. This would be good for the people who need them, good for the people who build them and good for those who work in the building supplies industry. If any place needs decent, warm, comfortable and affordable housing it is here in Pendle."

Note to Editors: There is a housing crisis in Britain today. It adds to the growing sense of insecurity felt by people in every walk of life in every part of Britain -

• 295,000 homeowners have seen their homes repossessed over the last five years

Housing crisis

• 1,300,000 homeowners are trapped in negative equity

• 160,000 households were officially recorded as homeless last year

• 1,500,000 homes are unfit for human habitation

What's happening to people who buy? House prices were static in 1994 and are expected to rise by about 2 per cent this year. Yet despite that, average costs for homebuyers will rise by over 10 per cent by October. This is a direct result of Government policy including higher interest rates, the reduction of MIRAS and the cost of private insurance to replace Income Support.

All this comes on top of the fact that -

• 250,000 homeowners are already more than six months in arrears with their mortgage, and

• 1,000 homes are still being repossessed every week and the total is forecast to increase because of Government cuts in the Income Support safety net

expenditure on home renovation grants has fallen by two thirds over the past five years and many homeowners are having to wait years for their applications to be considered

What's happening to people who rent? Tenants can expect to continue to suffer rent increases way above inflation -

• Council rents have risen by almost 80 per cent over the past five years compared with a 27 per cent increase in the Retail Price Index

• Housing Association rents have also been pushed up by three times the rate of inflation. Average rents for new three-bedroom lettings are now almost £62.00 per week

• rent increases have been steepest for private tenants as a result of Tory deregulation so Housing Benefit costs have rocketed from £4.1 billion in 1988/89 to over £10 billion last year

• the Tories used to claim that Housing Benefit would protect tenants from the impact of rising rents. Now they are proposing harsh cuts in Housing Benefit exposing thousands of tenants to debt and homelessness

What's happening to the housing programme? Britain's housing programme has been drastically cut over 16 years of Tory Government -

• only 178,000 homes were completed last year compared with an average of 290,000 a year when Labour was in power

• last year fewer than 2,000 new homes for rent were built by Councils compared with an average of 110,000 each year with Labour. That's just one home being built now for every 55 built under Labour

• the Tories claim that Housing Associations have made up for the houses

Housing Crisis

Councils haven't been allowed to build, but that's not true

• last year, just 37,000 new homes for rent were built by Councils and Housing Associations combined compared with an average of 145,000 a year when Labour was in power. That's just one home built now for every four built under Labour

• following two successive years' cuts in 'their budget, Housing Associations are only expected to complete about 20,000 rented homes in the coming year

• this will mean the lowest output of rented homes in any year since the end of the Second World War Benefit system.

The Tories promised to make Britain the best housed nation in Europe. They have failed miserably. Labour will act to tackle the huge problems which we will inherit and to give every member of our society the prospect of a decent home at a cost they can afford.

55/95: For Immediate Release: 27 February 1995

ROADS MINISTER WILL LOOK AGAIN AT THE COLNE FOULRIDGE BY-PASS

The Roads Minister, John Watts MP, is to have another look at traffic forecasts at Colne following a meeting earlier today with Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and an all party group of councillors and officers from four local authorities. (Lancashire and North Yorkshire County Councils and Craven and Pendle District Councils.)

The deputation pressed for a new single carriageway by-pass skirting Colne and Foulridge and the trunking of the A56. The A59 would then be de-trunked.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I thought the Minister gave us a fair hearing. We told him that the completion of the motorway link between the M6 and M65 would dump thousands of vehicles into Colne and a by-pass was absolutely essential."

"The Minister wanted to know why the by-pass couldn't be built as a local scheme by Lancashire County Council. We told him the work was essentially part of the national trunk road network and it was needed now because of the motorway link up with the M6."

"The Minister asked the County Councils and the Highways Agency to try to agree figures for the forecast traffic increase and he would look at the matter again. He did stress his room for manoeuvre was limited following the £700m cut in the roads

budget. He said he would be prepared to come to North East Lancashire to see for himself - if a date could be cleared in his diary. I shall be pressing him hard to follow things up with a "site visit"."

56/95: For Immediate Release: 1 March 1995

BAN ON FOX HUNTING BACKED BY MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be supporting a Bill in the House of Commons this Friday which will ban fox hunting. The Wild Mammals Protection Bill will extend legal protection from all acts of cruelty to all wild animals.

The MP said: "All right thinking people are sickened by the sight of cruelty to defenceless wild animals. This Bill will outlaw traditional field sports such as fox hunting with hounds and hare coursing and it will protect wild mammals in the same way as domestic or captive animals are protected."

"I have had hundreds of people in Pendle write to me about this issue - pleading with me to give the animals a break."

"I like animals and I have no time for people who say it is sport to see them torn apart, limb from limb, in a bloody spectacle."

ends

Note to Editors: The RSPCA has issued the following briefing on the Bill

Is this the first time Parliament has debated this principle?

No. A similar bill sponsored by Kevin McNamara MP was defeated at the second reading by 12 votes in February 1992. Support by Parliament on 3 March would be a landmark decision.

Will this Bill become law?

Because of limited Parliamentary time available to Private Members Bills, this Bill may not become law. However, a clear decision by Parliament now is a strong indicator that sooner or later such a law will be introduced.

What is the public attitude?

In a recent RSPCA poll by NOP:

• 94 per cent of people thought wild animals like foxes, deer and hares should be protected from acts of cruelty.

• 93 per cent wanted their MP to support the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill.

When asked specifically

• 75 per cent thought fox-hunting with hounds should be made illegal.

• 83 per cent thought stag hunting should be made illegal

• 80 per cent thought hare coursing should be made illegal.

• 53 per cent thought MPs should be guided by the view of their electorate, 27 per cent by concern for the animals, only 19 per cent by their conscience (which suggests people believe that MPs are elected to represent their views).

Aren't some animals already protected?

Yes. Some wild mammals such as otters and dormice are completely protected by the law because of their rarity. Badgers, because of the known cruel treatment at the hands of terrier men are given some protection from those who would wish to dig them out of their setts and kill them.

Wild mammals, such as foxes and hares are not protected from ill-treatment. Even the Deer Act is not adequate, for instance, permitting the use of dogs to kill deer in England and Wales.

How will the Bill protect such species?

This Bill will give wild mammals specific protection from acts of cruelty, such as being hunted or harassed by dogs, or sadistic acts of cruelty such as hedgehogs being used as footballs.

Aren't there already laws to protect animals from cruelty?

Yes. But the Protection of Animals Act 1911, most commonly used by the RSPCA to prosecute, only applies to domestic animals - cats, dogs etc - and captive wild animals. It does not protect animals in their wild and free state.

What are the penalties for offences under this Bill?

As with other cruelty offences, penalties would be a fine of up to £5,000 and/or imprisonment for up to six months. The court may also disqualify the offender for any period from having custody of a dog.

Would the Bill end all field sports?

No. Fishing and shooting are unaffected. The Bill would outlaw cruel activities, such as foxdigging, or fox-hunting where dogs (usually hounds, terriers, lurchers) are used by making it illegal to wilfully cause a dog to kill, injure, attack or pursue wild mammals.

What would the Bill do to snaring?

There are two types of snare. The use of the self locking snare is already illegal; the free-running snare can only be set for some animals but frequently catches animals other than the intended target, including badgers, cats and dogs. This Bill would further control snaring, by only allowing their use under licence. This should reduce the use of snares.

What effect does this Bill have on pests like mice and rats?

This Bill does not affect the control of mice or rats. The Bill would still allow the use of dogs to kill rats and rabbits. The use of poisons and traps is covered in other legislation.

Won't this Bill interfere with farmer and affect their livelihoods?

No. This Bill recognises important aspects of country life; and problems that may affect farmers from time to time:

• It therefore does not stop a farmer's dog protecting his or her livestock or hen house.

• It does not stop a dog being used to deal with rabbits or rodents (rats etc).

• It does not outlaw all use of snares, though their use should be strictly limited.

• It does not stop farmers tackling a local fox problem by using humane methods, including shooting.

What does the Bill say about controlling pest foxes?

The best protection from predators for livestock such as free-range poultry is effective fencing. The RSPCA believes that, above all, humane methods should be used to control pest foxes. Where there is a proven problem, shooting at close range by a skilled shot is far more humane than the random pursuit and savaging by dogs of any fox which happens to be in the vicinity of the hunt. You do not have to declare war on a whole species because of individual fox problems. The problem of fox predation is frequently overstated, and the vast majority of lambs losses are due to cold, exposure and poor management - not foxes. The best scientific estimates suggest that lamb losses to foxes are less than one lamb per sheep farm per year, compared to 23 per year from other causes (cold, still births, starvation, accidents etc).

Do many foxes suffer injuries at the hands of inaccurate shooting?

There is little evidence that this is more than a rare occurrence. One can never guard against individuals recklessly injuring animals, but out of 1,693 sick and injured foxes collected by the RSPCA only one case was reported to have pellet injuries.

Does fox-hunting conserve hedgerows and coverts?

There is a mistaken belief that many hedgerows are maintained to serve as obstacles for the hunt, and that small woodlands are maintained to provide sites for foxes to live and breed. Farmers are encouraged by Government to maintain hedgerows for the good of the countryside. The presence of organised hunting is completely unconnected. In a survey of 3,700 landowners (1), 'fox covert' was the least common reason given for retaining and planting small woods. There is no reason to believe that a ban on hunting would lead to the destruction of such features.

Can stag hunting with hounds be justified to conserve deer numbers?

No. There are far more humane methods available. Culling of deer numbers is best done by a skilled marksman to minimise suffering. In Scotland, where stag hunting with hounds is banned, the deer population is managed by shooting. The cruelty of stag hunting is compounded in that the season (August to April) covers the period when many hinds are pregnant or have young with them.

Doesn't fox-hunting with hounds ensure a quick kill?

First the chase is often lengthy. Stress alone _ causes suffering, and both horses and hounds can be injured in the course of the chase. The dogs will fight with the fox upon capture, with dogs disembowelling the fox by tearing open its underbelly. The image of one hound killing the fox instantly with a single bite to the neck is a myth. Also, many foxes are driven to ground followed by terriers trained to corner the fox or drive it from cover. Only then it is killed.

Wouldn't fox numbers escalate if foxhunting with hounds was made illegal?

No. The total number of foxes killed by organised hunts is relatively small compared to the fox population. A recent Parliamentary answer suggested that about 12,500 foxes are killed by hunts, compared to 100,000 killed by other means such as shooting(2). Naturally, the fox population will peak at about half a million in the summer months, and fall to half that figure in the winter. Fox numbers are largely self regulating, influenced like all wildlife by weather conditions, food supply and other natural factors. Indeed, the random killing of foxes and dispersal of family groups brings non-breeding vixens into breeding, thereby increasing numbers. Evidence suggests that fox populations can recover extremely quickly from losses as great as 70 per cent; the population being totally restored within one year. The evidence that organised hunting controls the fox population by killing significant numbers is not justified. Organised hunting with hounds remains an irrelevance in terms of pest control.

57/95: For Immediate Release: 1 March 1995

MP BLASTS COST AND WASTE OF FOOD MOUNTAINS AND WINE LAKES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has hit out at the soaring cost of the Common Agricultural Policy which, he says, is pushing up the cost of food. He claims billions of pounds are being wasted.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: “The cost of the CAP is spiralling out of control. In 1979 the CAP budget was £6.4 billion. In 1994 the budget was £31.4 billion. An increase of 58% in real terms under this Conservative Government.”

“The CAP is a frankenstein which accounts for over half the 1994 EU budget. In the UK alone CAP market support will cost £2,592m in 1994/5. This money will be spent on the state intervention buying that builds up food mountains and pushes up food prices, on set-aside, and on the export refunds paid out as we dump subsidised surpluses on the world market.”

“The CAP is even failing in its objective to ensure fair living standards for the agricultural community. A vast share of CAP money still goes to a tiny proportion of farmers.

The MP continued: “I want to see an end to state intervention buying that creates the scandal of food mountains and drives prices up. And I want to see an end to export subsidies and the dumping of cheap food on World markets.

“There must be a serious crack-down on fraud, and the imposition of far stricter controls over the allocation of resources. I want to see a total reappraisal of the

objectives and operation of the CAP which puts support for agriculture alongside wider investment in rural areas, to stimulate new jobs and new investment which will benefit the whole rural economy - and places like Pendle."

Note to Editors

• The Conservatives have had 15 years to reform the Common Agricultural Policy. The truth is that this Government has never made a serious attempt

CAP reform

to reform the CAP.

• The Tory Government have actually claimed the reformed CAP to be their own creation. In 1993, John Selwyn Gummer told the House of Commons that he had got rid of the original MacSharry proposals to reform the CAP, and had replaced them with his own.

58/95: For Immediate Release: 1 March 1995

CURRY ACTS AS COMMISSAR says MP

Skipton and Ripon MP, David Curry, has been dubbed "a commissar" by Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, who represents the constituency of Pendle, next door. As Local Government Minister David Curry is responsible for piloting through Parliament the shake up of councils in England.

The Pendle MP was speaking at Westminster following last night's vote on the Government's proposal to wrench the City of York out of North Yorkshire County Council and create a new unitary council - Greater York - with responsibility for all local services including education and social services. The MP says the new council is one that no-one wants.

Prentice said: "This is the clearest possible example of the Government riding roughshod over local opinion. Only 30 people wrote to the Minister supporting the Greater York proposal compared with 1,066 against. No local authority supported the Government; seven were against. No parish councils for; 26 against."

"This is blatant gerrymandering to get rid of an outstanding Labour council. The Minister told us all 15 months ago that solutions shouldn't be imposed by *"a sort of commissar"*. That is precisely what has happened here."

Note to Editors: Mr Curry told the Environment Select Committee on 3 November 1993? He said then: *"We are seeking a structure of local government with which people can identify. How do you get there?... If you begin with recommendations which are based on local building blocks, which are based upon ideas that are generated locally, I believe that most people will endorse and support that. If you come up with recommendations which appear not to have been built upon local consent, not upon using the building blocks, which appear to have been, as it were, put together by a sort of commissar, then I think you will find that people are not very enthusiastic."*

59/95: For Immediate Release: 1 March 1995

PRENTICE BACKS PENDLE'S CARERS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is supporting the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill promoted by fellow Labour MP, Malcolm Wicks. The Bill is to be debated in Commons this Friday (3rd March).

The Bill which seeks to give carers the separate right to an assessment and better access to services would give carers the chance to have a much deserved break. With approximately 10,000 carers in Pendle this is an issue which is high on the MP's agenda.

The MP said: "Looking after the nation's carers is vital, not only for the person they are caring for and the carers themselves, but also for the survival of the government's policy of community care. I feel strongly that the time has come to offer practical support to carers instead of just well-meaning praise and I will be in the House of Commons on 3rd March to support the Bill."

A recent survey found that 90% of carers wanted their own legal right to an assessment of their needs.

The MP continued: "I know of many people locally who, for erxample, care for elderly relativers who need round-the-clock attention. These carers need a little bit of help, just one good night's sleep a week. If this Bill is successful, then their needs will be recognised too."

Notes to Editors: Britain's 6.8 million carers - one adult in seven - are estimated to save the country some £30 million per annum - approximately the equivalent of the Department of Health total budget.

1.5 million carers put in at least 20 hours of care a week - a larger number than the entire health and social services practitioner workforce.

60/95: For Immediate Release: 1 March 1995

CHEMFUEL GIVEN THUMBS DOWN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is objecting to the burning of Cemfuel by Castle Cement in Clitheroe. The MP says there are conventional alternatives to the controversial fuel.

The MP said: "Although Castle Cement is next door in Ribble Valley I have a clear interest. In certain weather conditions I am sure the smoke will drift across into my constituency. As it is, I pity the poor people of Clitheroe which is sometimes enveloped in a pall of smoke from Castle Cement's chimneys."

"Only two plants in the country, at Clitheroe and Barrington, use Chemfuel. No-one else has applied to burn this stuff. The lion's share is burnt here in Lancashire - 3,400 tonnes as opposed to 1,300 tonnes at Barrington."

"We had a similar problem before with the proposal to burn Orimulsion at Padiham Power Station. Although, again, it was outside my constituency the plume of smoke would have descended on Pendle."

"I want to breath fresh air - not sooty smoke from someone else's chimney."

Note to Editors: In February 1995, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. The consultation period will run until 29 March.

61/95: For Immediate Release: 13 March 1995

NYNEX SHOULD "PICK UP THE TAB" FOR CABLING PENDLE says LOCAL MP

Nynex, the company that is cabling Pendle, should cover the inspection and monitoring costs likely to be incurred by the local council says MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP is to meet the company shortly to discuss its plans in detail.

The MP said: "Miles of pavements are going to be dug up to lay the cables and we all want to ensure that everything is reinstated - and, is possible, improved - after the cable laying gangs have been along the road. I am very concerned to ensure the roots of trees are not damaged."

The MP was enthusiastic about the benefits of the new technology: "After the inevitable initial disruption we want to see the benefits of the information highway made available to everyone. There must be no divided Britain in the new information age. We cannot allow a society of information *haves* and *have-nots* to develop.

"The development of new technologies means that enormous amounts of information can now be sent around the world: the entire contents of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, for example, can be transmitted in half a second. It takes your breath away."

The MP said: "I want every school, every public library and every hospital and doctor's surgery in this area to be linked up in due course to the Information Superhighway, so that everyone can benefit from access to information. Giving pupils in our local schools the chance to link themselves up to the entire resources of the British Library or the Science Museum at the touch of a computer key will offer tremendous new educational opportunities."

62/95: For Immediate Release: 7 March 1995

CROWN POST OFFICES "AN ENDANGERED SPECIES" says MP

The number of Crown Post Offices in Lancashire has shrunk from 21 in April 1990 to 13 by April of last year. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who extracted the figures from Trade Minister, Richard Page, says this familiar high street landmark is becoming an endangered species.

The MP said: "Unless we call a halt now, the Crown Post Office could go the way of the woolly mammoth - into extinction. The Post Office has an obligation to provide the full range of services people expect from a Crown Post Office. Franchising and moving post offices into supermarkets is the cut price option."

"In Great Britain as a whole the situation is truly alarming. In 1990 there were 1,315 Crown Post Offices. Last year there were 782."

63/95: For Immediate Release: 2 March 1995

PENDLE MP SLAMS NEW SHAKE UP OF LANCASHIRE

Today's decision by the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, to ask the Local Government Commission to have another look at the structure of Councils in Lancashire has been condemned by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "Gummer wants to wrench Blackburn and Blackpool out of the county and given these authorities unitary status. The rest of us in Lancashire will be paying for this. In my view it is another expensive mistake waiting to happen."

"If the Government was unhappy with the Commission's proposal Gummer should have referred the whole thing back, lock, stock and barrel."

"The proposed local authority map of England is a real dog's breakfast."

64/95: For Immediate Release: 7 March 1995

GOVERNMENT ADMITS "ERROR" IN AMOUNT OF CHEMFUEL BURNT AT CLITHEROE

The Environment Minister, South Ribble MP, Robert Atkins, has confessed the information he gave Pendle's Labour MP about the burning of Chemfuel was all wrong.

When the Pendle MP quizzed the Minister last week about what was happening at Castle Cement's Clitheroe plant he was told 3,400 tonnes of the fuel - made from distilled recovered solvents - had been burnt at Clitheroe and another 1,300 at Barrington. On both counts the information was incorrect.

Prentice said: "I am now told ten times as much Chemfuel has gone up the chimney at Castle Cement - 34,000 tonnes out of a total of 37,000 tonnes burnt in England. The other place is Ketton - not Barrington."

"Robert Atkins really ought to get his act together. Chemfuel is a red hot issue on his doorstep right here in Lancashire and he should have the facts at his fingertips."

The Pendle MP, whose constituency is next door to Ribble Valley, continued: "Some days the plume of smoke from Castle Cement's chimney seems to touch the ground in Clitheroe and I ask myself what on earth am I breathing?"

Note to Editors: In February 1995, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. The consultation period will run until 29 March.

65/95: For Immediate Release: 7 March 1995

WEST CRAVEN STUDENTS DROP IN AT WESTMINSTER

Eight students from West Craven High School in Barnoldswick dropped into Westminster last week for a guided tour of Parliament by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "I thoroughly enjoy chatting to young people about life at Westminster and how our laws are made."

“Young people are refreshingly candid. If they think something is wrong and needs to be changed they don’t mince their words. They tell you straight. It is music to my ears.”

66/95: For Immediate Release: 13 March 1995

PRIVATISED ELECTRICITY UTILITIES ROCKED BY SHARE ISSUE FIASCO

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is accusing the Government of insider dealing in the £4 billion sale of shares in National Power and Power Gen. He says that the Government knew of impending price curbs for the 12 regional electricity companies before the share issue went ahead, but deliberately withheld this market-sensitive information, in order to ensure the sale was a success. The MP says US investors are now considering withholding payments for shares they bought, on the basis that the shares were sold under a false prospectus.

“I have written to the Electricity Regulator urging him to put a cap on electricity prices which are far higher than they need be. Every time we stick a plug in a socket, the meter starts spinning at breakneck speed at the HQ of Norweb and Yorkshire Electricity and all the others.”

The Pendle MP said: “People who bought shares in the expectation that the shares would increase in value have had their fingers badly burnt. But, more worrying still are the millions of people, who do not have the means to invest in the stock market, who will be affected through the decision of their pension funds to take part in the share offer. Electricity shares were overvalued, having been kept artificially high by five years of excessive electricity prices.”

Note to Editors: The Share Issue - the facts

• The offer for the remaining 40 per cent Government stake in National Power and PowerGen was closed on Friday, 3 March

• On Tuesday, 7 March, the electricity industry regulator, Professor Stephen Littlechild, announced that he was considering action to tighten price caps on the 12 regional electricity companies

• Shares in the electricity power industry - generators and regional companies - immediately crashed by a total of £3.5 billion. By Thursday share values had fallen by £3.9 billion. Anticipated gains from the newly issued power generators' shares have been wiped out.

Electricity rip off

The Share issue - the background Professor Stephen Littlechild had consulted with the Government on his plans to crack down on prices. He said: "The Government was aware of what I was envisaging doing."

On Friday, 3 March, the Treasury consulted with its lawyers and financial advisers about the implications of a change to the pricing controls. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury Sir George Young, has confirmed the Government had considered postponing the flotation, but was advised that the price curbs were immaterial to the sale. He also said that Professor Littlechild had cleared the prospectus.

Professor Littlechild said of the Government decision that it was “up to them to decide whether it had implications” for prices. But added that potential buyers of shares could not be kept ignorant. They were kept ignorant and the sale went ahead.

The Scandal of Electricity Privatisation The National Grid was valued at £780m (including debts) in March 1990 before it was privatised.

The 12 regional electricity companies are now thinking of selling the National Grid for up to **£5 billion** - equivalent to the total revenue from privatising the entire electricity industry

• The average salaries of the chief executives of the 12 regional electricity companies is £257,000

• The average salaries of the chief executives of National Power, PowerGen and the National Grid is £400,000

• The Northern Electric regional company was prepared to offer shareholders a £560m bonus to persuade them to reject the £1.23bn takeover bid by Trafalgar House

• 39,000 jobs have been cut in the electricity industry since privatisation

• Electricity charges for domestic consumers have gone up 21.4% since privatisation, according to the Electricity Consumers' Council

• In 1994 typical household bills rose by 13 per cent, while regional electricity company profits jumped by 85 per cent.

Note to editors 2: The Pendle MP wrote to the Electricity Regulator on 9 March as follows:

Dear Professor Littlechild

I am writing to you about the consultation exercise on the electricity industry price review which was launched on the 10th February 1995. A number of issues have arisen with respect to the electricity industry which in my view provide a strong case for you to lower the price caps you first announced in 1994.

The general reaction of the City to the price review was that it had been extremely lenient towards the Regional Electricity Companies. The fact that 77 leading directors of the privatised electricity industry in England and

Wales and a small number of executives have awarded themselves more than £72 million strongly reinforces the view of the City. This is also borne out by the reaction of Northern Electric to the hostile bid from Trafalgar House with the announcement by Northern that they can pay £560 million to investors without damaging dividend potential.

Clearly the British public are angry at the disclosure of huge increases in income from share options to directors of Regional Electricity Companies which in reality reflect monopoly profits. In the case of Northern Electric alone it seems the value of such options is estimated at £9.6 million.

In these circumstances I strongly impress upon you to tighten up the price regime before the new price caps come into effect on the 1st April 1995. Regulation has been weak and electricity consumers deserve much more effective protection than currently afforded them. I hope that you will act in the public interest and provide it for them.

67/95: For Immediate Release: 13 March 1995

MP SLAMS “INEQUALITY OF HEALTH”

Inequality in the UK has grown faster over the last 15 years than in any other industrialised country except New Zealand according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster after the publication of the controversial BMA study into inequality and Health, the MP said that one in four people now live in a household with an income below half the national average, compared to 1 in 10 in 1979. The bottom tenth of the population are 17 per cent worse off after housing costs than in 1979.

“The latest official figures, adjusted for sex and age profile show that there are significant variations in health across the nation. Here in Pendle, we have an incredibly high incidence of disabling long term illness.”

“All across the country the health gap between rich and poor areas is dramatically widening. Children are two and a half times more likely to die before they reach the age of 15 if they live in Central Manchester than if they live in Huntingdon. Sunderland has the highest death rate from coronary heart disease in England and Wales - 40 per cent above the national average - and double the rate in Hampstead.

“The death rate of 15-44 year olds living in deprived parts of Glasgow increased by 9 per cent over the period 1980-92, while it fell by 14% in nearby more affluent parts of Glasgow.”

“What we are witnessing today is a return of the *"diseases of squalor"* which were common in Victorian times. The incidence of scabies has more than doubled in five years. TB cases in the East End of London are currently running at 10 times the national average. Scurvy, diphtheria and the possible re-appearance of polio are also worrying public health doctors in Britain.”

“We need to put the relationship between deprivation and ill health at the front of the public health agenda. Tackling the causes of ill health will be best served by an approach which combines economic opportunity, access to childcare, employment generation, education, housing and urban regeneration.”

Note to Editors: A report last week from the British Medical Association (BMA) showed that, just as income inequality has increased since 1979, the 'health gap' between rich and poor is growing wider. Its main conclusions are:

* The widening health gap between rich and poor is a direct result of the government's wrong priorities and unfair policies.

* The government must take responsibility for the wider influences of its policies on health.

* Improving the health of everyone will require action across a range of departments to reduce deprivation and inequality.

Even though the BMA study is the latest in a long line of reports pointing to deprivation as a cause of ill health, the Department of Health has consistently failed to acknowledge these findings.The reality is that poverty ought to carry a government health warning.

For Immediate Release: 3 March 1994
68/94

PRENTICE SAYS NO HALF MEASURES

Moves to outlaw short measures are to be voted on in the House of Commons Deregulation Bill Committee today. Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, is dead against Government proposals to legalise short measures in pubs.

Before the 1992 election, the Government promised to outlaw short measures for beer drinkers. Now, Ministers have caved in to pressure from the brewing industry which donated nearly £2 million to the Tories. A survey in December carried out by West Midlands Trading Standards officers showed that in 21 pubs surveyed 85% of the pints were short - containing as much as 10% below a full pint. Recent surveys in London and Gloucestershire show the same.

The Pendle MP, who is a member of the Committee, says: "Ministers are legalising short measures for over 20 million beer drinkers who drink a total of 256 million pints every year. For years drinkers have had to put up with short measures. This is a disgraceful betrayal of consumers who are being forced to pay for a full pint but receive only 95% of a pint. Imagine if people were told they would only get 95% of the pint of milk they paid of, or only 11 eggs when they bought and paid for a dozen!"

"The price of beer has already risen by 25% above inflation in the past decade. Before the 1992 general election, the Consumer Minister, Edward Leigh promised action. In an official DTI press release (5.3.92) he said: "I strongly believe that consumers should get what they pay for, if a pint is ordered, a pint of liquid beer is what they should get."

The DTI told British glass manufacturers in 1985 to gear up to supplying measured glasses. Paul Edwards of Dema International of Derbyshire advised the DTI in March 1993 that they had spent £150,000 on new moulds and a further £28,000 on associated costs. He says: "The £178,000 is a non-recoverable cost." The largest glass manufacturer in the UK Ravenglass has spent nearly £1 million on retooling equipment and on new moulds. They had intended to take on 100 extra staff to make the new glasses. Some breweries have already introduced measured glasses. Wolverhampton & Dudley say they save money suppling larger 24OZ glasses because Trading Standards Officers don't have to calibrate their glasses. Instead their pumps deliver the measured pint which TSOs accept.

Prentice added: "Government dithering and now this U-turn has thrown the business into chaos. Companies have wasted large sums to prepare for this. What a shambles! The real losers are consumers and British glass companies and brewers who acted in

good faith. Ministers have bowed to outside pressure from one vested interest group and changed their mind. They are not fit to hold office."

Note to Editors: Labour's Shadow Consumer Minister Nigel Griffiths MP says: "Of the 11 members of John Major's Deregulation Committee which recommended legalising short measures, two are from breweries (S&N group & Whitbread) who donated over £700,000 to the Tory Party. I am asking members of the Committee of Privileges to investigate the undesirable influence big companies are having on the business of the House of Commons. "

"Other brewery donations to the Tories are as follows: Allied Lyons £1,096,000, S&N £413,000 and Whitbread £297,000. A further nine breweries gave the Tories over £40,000 - the Vaux Group, Fuller Smith & Turner, Hardys & Hansons, Daniel Thwaites, Hall & Woodhouse, McMullen and Son's, Everards, Heavitree and Shepherd Neame."

"I believe the Tories did a deal with brewers before the last election. They were so desperate to buy their way back to power that they promised their brewer backers they'd drop their pre-election promise to beer drinkers. In return the Tories got big campaign donations."

"The 1989 Parliamentary Register of Members' Interest shows that the Deregulation Minister Neil Hamilton who is responsible for this measure was a paid consultant to the Brewers' Society, the major lobby organisation against the full pint."

Labour has the support of the Consumers Association (071 830 6000) and CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale representing small breweries and beer drinkers. CAMRA Campaign's Manager Stephen Cox (0727 867201) says: "The Government has decided to ignore consumer groups and trading standards officers. It has changed its policy twice in three years. The government are caving in to the usual vested interest."

68/95: EMBARGOED: 15 March 1995

MP STILL GUNNING FOR LORD ARCHER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is spitting feathers over the persistent refusal of the former Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party and millionaire novelist to answer letters about his controversial share dealing in Anglia TV last year. The Pendle MP has fired off countless letters to the peer who refuses to reply. The MP has tabled a Commons motion condemning Lord Archer.

Prentice said: “If Lord Archer thinks I’ll lose interest in the matter then he doesn’t know me very well. I want to know why he bought the shares in Anglia TV which netted a profit of £80,000 in a matter of a few days. He can run but he can’t hide. I’ll get off his back when he answers the questions that have been troubling me ever since his share dealings came to light.”

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads:
CONDUCT OF LORD ARCHER IN RESPECT OF SHARE DEALING

“That this House unreservedly condemns the persistent unwillingness of Lord Archer to respond to questions about his share dealing activities in Anglia TV, notes that his personal assistant, Charlotte Barton, acknowledged on 23 January 1995 the receipt of

EDM 374 and the covering letter from the Member for Pendle indicating that the matter would be drawn to the attention of the noble Lord in February on his return from abroad, notes that the member for Pendle has heard nothing since from Lord Archer and considers such behaviour a grave discourtesy and recalls that on 13th January 1994, Lord Archer purchased the first of two tranches of Anglia TV shares and notes his statement in July 1994 that it was completely untrue that he bought shares and that such an accusation was libellous; notes that he subsequently confessed that he had made a grave error in buying shares and his later statement that the Department of Trade and Industry report completely exonerated him; calls on the noble Lord to explain why he bought shares on behalf of Mr Broosk Saib, why he was confident the share price would rise, why he asked for the transaction to be done on new account dealing terms, whether the shares were to be held as a long-term investment and, if so, whether the noble Lord or Mr Saib would pay the £240,000 for the shares on settlement day; and calls on the noble Lord to answer these simple and straightforward questions.

69/95: For Immediate Release: 14 March 1995

PENDLE "ROBBED" OF 82 NEW HOMES

Figures produced by the national Federation of Housing Associations show Pendle short of 82 new homes compared with what the Government promised in its 1992 Autumn Statement plans. There are 1,638 people on the Borough's housing waiting list.

The figures show the Government promised £2,843,277 but actually came up with £1,209,905. Instead of the 143 homes that could have been built if all the money had been forthcoming, only 61 were delivered leaving a shortfall of 82.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The number of homes to rent planned for 1995/6 by Housing Associations has been cut by 57% because of cuts in Government support. The figures for Pendle dramatically highlight the practical implications for people desperate for a decent roof over their head."

"The NFHA estimates that 124,000 new affordable homes are needed every year just to keep pace with demographic and labour market changes yet just 15,000 are planned."

"These are horrifying statistics and I shall be pressing the Government to look again at the implications of their policy of salami slicing the housing association grant."

70/95: For Immediate Release: 15 March 1995

PENDLE JOBLESS DIPS

The number of unemployed people in Pendle claiming benefit last month has fallen back to 2,411 from the January figure of 2,497. The figures, published today, show 1,843 men are out of work (8.5%) and 568 women (3.6%). Vacancies are static at Colne Job Centre but are sharply up at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "This fall is to be welcomed but I hope it can be sustained. And we are all totally sceptical about the figures."

“The unemployment figures have been fiddled so often the very integrity of the series is now questionable. The Government is planning yet another change in the way the statistics are presented that will make local jobless rates look better while making comparisons with the 1980s more difficult.”

“More than 30 changes have been made since 1979 in the way the unemployment figures are calculated and all but one have revised the figures downwards. The latest plan is to drop "narrow-based rates from the regional statistics the Government publishes each month in favour of “work-force based” rates which show male unemployment being up to 3.5% better.”

Note to Editors: The narrow base consists of people in employment plus the numbers of unemployment benefit claimants actively seeking work. The workforce base adds the numbers in the armed forces, the self employed and those on Government training schemes thus lowering the unemployment rate.

71/95: Embargoed: 15 March 1995

MP GOES TO POT

The controlled drug, Cannabis, should be legalised for therapeutic use says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He is backing a Commons motion which calls for the ban on the controversial drug to be lifted where its use has a beneficial effect.

The MP said: “I have had a number of constituents urge me to call for the wholesale legalisation of cannabis saying the drug had important therapeutic uses.”

“I have gone into the matter in some detail and I believe the arguments for allowing medical use of cannabis are now compelling. The Australian Parliament has just legalised the possession and cultivation of cannabis for medicinal use. Indeed it used to be prescribed here in the UK until 1971.”

“The only thing that will stop legalisation for therapeutic use is blind indifference to the evidence of our own eyes.”

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads:

That this House congratulates the Canberra Assembly of Australia for legalising the possession and cultivation of cannabis for medicinal use; applauds the 35 states of the United Statues that have allowed its use for therapeutic purposes; notes that cannabis was prescribed in the United kingdom until 1971 without harmful results; and urges the Government to respond swiftly and positively to the evidence of the Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics that the drug relieves the symptoms of multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, AIDS and some cancers.

72/95: For Immediate Release: 15 March 1995

MP CALLS FOR ACTION ON PUNCH DRUNK BOXERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for urgent research into brain damage to boxers and how it can be prevented or minimised. The MP is shocked at recent professional bouts in which boxers have died and others have been left comatose.

The MP said: "I have always taken the view that people freely choose to become professional boxers and they know the risks. I believe referees should step in quickly just as soon as a boxer is showing signs of distress but, I am afraid to say, that just doesn't seem to happen."

"The purses in professional boxing are so huge now that boxers are allowed to hammer hell out of each other long after the fight should have been stopped. In amateur boxing there are no qualms about stopping a contest before a boxer gets seriously hurt."

"The Health Minister has told me the Medical Research Council is not currently undertaking any research specifically into brain damaged boxer~ although, last year, they did spend £761,0()0 on research into head injury. This sum is a tiny fraction of what the winner would net in a world championship fight."

"I don't know what it takes for the Government to conduct an urgent reappraisal of the risks of professional boxing and what, if anything, can be done to mitigate the effects. I want Frank Bruno to stick to television and pantomimes and stay out of the ring."

Note to Editors: The MRC supports research in a number of areas that arc relevant to brain damage in boxers including dementia, pain. vision, cognitive changes and brain repair. The Department of Health has just commissioned a study entitled Rehabilitation of Brain Injured Adults costing about £1.2m

75/95: For Immediate Release: 21 March 1995

MP SLAMS JOBSEEKER'S BILL

The controversial Jobseeker's Bill returns to the House of Commons this Wednesday (22 March) for its Report Stage. It introduces a Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) to replace existing unemployment-related benefits from April 1996. It could also pave the way to localised benefit rates under its piloting provisions.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "This *Jobseeker's* Bill makes a mockery of the English language. If they had any honesty at all, the Government should have called it the *"Unemployment Benefit Reduction Bill"*. It will penalise - in a savage way - people who have the misfortune to be out of work and have to claim benefit. It is part and parcel of the Government's strategy of creating a low wage, low benefit society."

Note to Editors: What's wrong with the JSA?

Benefit cuts. **Currently,** unemployed people who have paid sufficient contributions qualify for a non-means-tested Unemployment Benefit for 12 months, followed by Income Support on a means-tested basis. The JSA will replace both benefits. It will be non-means-tested for only six months, and means-tested thereafter. Benefit entitlement will therefore be halved, at a time when contributions are increasing. 250,000 people will be affected, and 90,000 will lose their benefit entirely. It will cut £400m from the benefits bill, though job losses from privatised utilities have already cost taxpayers up to £1 billion.

Disabled people Thousands of people who qualify for Invalidity Benefit will no longer qualify for the new Incapacity Benefit, which has a tighter incapacity test. At

the same time, they may not meet the tighter availability for work test of the JSA and lose benefits entirely. Up to 200,000 will be affected.

Low pay The JSA will deepen the crisis of low pay. Such are the draconian rules that an unemployed person can be cut off from benefit for refusing a job which pays as little as £1 an hour.

21-hour rule The 21-hour rule allows long-term unemployed people to study part-time, without loss of benefit, for up to 21 hours a week. Last month, Ann Widdecombe introduced amendments to the Bill to cut this from 21 to 16 hours. Around 6,000 students will lose their right to benefit because of this.

Jobseekers

In Committee, the Opposition has already won some important concessions. We have ensured that people will receive full benefits while awaiting adjudication on disqualification for voluntary unemployment and jobseeker's direction. And we have restored the right to refuse a job if travelling time is excessive and work-based expenses represent an unreasonably high proportion of wages.

76/95: For Immediate Release: 20 March 1995

PRENTICE RENEWS DEMAND FOR MINIMUM WAGE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for a minimum wage. The MP has regularly drawn attention to what he has described as “slave labour” rates of pay in North East Lancashire.

Speaking at Westminster in advance of Wednesday’s debate, the MP said: “Low pay has increased since 1979, and the gap between the lowest-paid and highest-paid has grown even wider in recent years with the abolition of Wages Councils on the one hand and the excesses of boardroom bosses on the other.”

“Low pay deprives working people of financial independence. It is discriminatory - it affects far more women than men. It demotivates workers, leading to low morale and high staff turnover. It puts a burden on taxpayers who have to subsidise the profits of low-paying employers through benefits to their workers. Next year, Family Credit - a benefit only paid to people in low paid work - is set to rise to £1.6 billion a year - equivalent to 1p on the basic rate. Low pay does not create jobs - industries formerly covered by Wages Councils have not increased employment since abolition, just cut pay.”

“The case for a minimum wage is absolutely compelling. People will be entitled to earn fair remuneration for the work they do. Paid work, at a fair wage, is the most effective way of attacking poverty. People will be lifted out of benefit dependency, giving them back their dignity. Pay differences between men and women will be reduced. Workers will be better motivated, and therefore more productive. Staff turnover will be lower, reducing the costs to employers of recruitment and training. Public resources will be freed from subsidising low pay for other uses improving health and education and creating work for the unemployed.

Note to Editors: Britain is the only country in Europe without statutory pay protection.

Minimum Wage

Britain is the only country out of 99 signatories to the ILO Convention on pay to abandon statutory minimum wages.

The recent International Labour Organisation report, *World Employment 1995,* confirms the international experience that the minimum wage does not harm jobs.

> *"The bulk of empirical evidence largely finds the impact of minimum wages on employment to be insignificant."*

The latest evidence from the USA comparing wage rates in the fast-food industry in states and between states shows that employment actually rose when minimum pay rates rose.

77/95: For Immediate Release: 21 March 1995

MP PREDICTS MORE SHARE OPTION "SCANDALS" ARE IN THE PIPELINE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is predicting a "cascade of executive pay scandals" this coming June and July when the privatised utilities report on the share options granted over the year and salary increases to directors.

The MP's predictions are borne out by a leaked letter from the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, to John Major which shows that directors and senior executives in the privatised utilities have over £100 million in share option profits. If Cable & Wireless is included then the figure rises to £150 million.

The MP said: "The leaked letter confirms what we have been saying for months - these excessive gains are not justified by performance. Heseltine says: *"We have assumed none of the options is related to performance . . . Examination of the accounts suggests that this is generally the case'.*

"We need tough new rules to rein in these utilities that are now out of control. The utility regulators should be given the power to adjust prices so that consumers do not bear the cost of excessive executive pay. And the regulators should be required to take their decisions in an open pubic forum so that other parties can examine their argument and present their own evidence."

"The annual accounts of all UK Public Limited Companies should be required to disclose all aspects of directors' remuneration for each director. And shareholders should be required to vote on remuneration committee recommendations for directors' pay and share options."

"Finally, these gold plated executive share options should be taxed as income and not as a capital gain removing at a stroke the tax reliefs that are currently available."

78/95: For Immediate Release: 22 March 1995

MP BLASTS QUARRY EXTENSION

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted the decision by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Committee (the local planning authority) to give the go ahead to Tilcon to continue quarrying at Swinden, near Grassington, until 2020.

The MP, whose Pendle constituency is next door to Skipton and Ripon where the quarry lies, said: "This decision - taken on the casting vote of the Chairman - is bad news for the Dales and bad news for everyone who cares about the environment. Already, the land around the quarry is coated with white dust and this is to continue for the next quarter of a century."

The MP continued: "The limestone from this quarry is very high quality. According to the consultation draft of the Yorkshire Dales Minerals and Waste Local Plan, published in January, this limestone is suitable for some of the highest specification industrial uses yet almost half of it (47%) goes to make roads. The document says:*the present position, particularly for limestone quarries, is not compatible with the principles of sustainable development*."

"The decision flies in the face of the Government's stated policy set out in the White Paper *"This Common Inheritance".* The Government says it will continue to give the protection of the National Parks the highest priority. But allowing Tilcon to gouge an enormous great hole out of the floor of the existing quarry at Swinden is a strange way of showing it."

79/95: For Immediate Release: 22 March 1995

ARCHER BREAKS SILENCE ON SHARE DEALING SCAM

Lord Archer, the controversial peer at the centre of the row over the purchase of shares in Anglia television last year, has finally broken six months of silence in a five line letter to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP has been pressing the peer to come clean and answer a series of unanswered questions.

The MP said: "Lord Archer told me DTI lawyers said there was no case to answer and that independent lawyers called in by the President of the Board of Trade had come to the same conclusion. However, the DTI Inspectors' report has never been published. And we don't know what instructions were given to the independent lawyers by Michael Heseltine nor the advice he received. We are expected to take everything on good faith when Lord Archer could lay the matter to rest by answering a few simple questions. At the end of the day, the answers to the questions that have been perplexing me will emerge."

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads:
CONDUCT OF LORD ARCHER IN RESPECT OF SHARE DEALING

"That this House notes that after an inordinate delay of six months Lord Archer has finally replied to the hon Member for Pendle about the peer's share dealing in Anglia Television in January 1994; further notes the noble Lord's comment that DTI lawyers said there was no case to answer and that the Secretary of State decided to ask the advice of independent lawyers who came to exactly the same conclusion; recalls that neither the DTI Inspectors' report nor the instructions to or advice from the independent lawyers have ever been published; believes that a string of questions remain unanswered and again invites the noble Lord to lay the matter to rest once and for all by simply explaining why he bought shares on behalf of Mr Broosk Saib, why he was confident the share price would rise, why he asked for the transaction to

be done on new account dealing terms, whether the shares were to be held as a long-term investment and, if so, whether the noble Lord or Mr Saib would pay the £240,000 for the shares on settlement day."

80/95: For Immediate Release: 27 March 1995

MP DERIDES "FEEL GOOD FACTOR"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has ridiculed speculation about whether a "feel good factor" could help the Government out of its present difficulties.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "The headline rate of inflation reached 3.3% in January and has been rising now for four months in a row since a rate of 2.2% in September. Yet just over two months ago in his budget speech the Chancellor said he expected underlying inflation to rise to "a temporary plateau of 2.5%" but it now stands at 2.8%."

"The Government recites this mantra about low inflation when all around industries are keeling over. There is no inflation in a cemetery because there is not a lot going on. The Chancellor still thinks there is a steel industry at Consett. And the famous nappy factory of Mr Clarke's imagination closed down in 1991."

"Even on its own terms, the Government's record is pretty abysmal. Our currency was devalued at a stroke following Britain's exit from the ERM and yet the Prime Minister has the gall to talk about the Opposition being the Party of devaluation."

"Even with the pound at 2.22 Deutsche Marks currently - and that is a 25% devaluation compared with the rate that John Major as Chancellor took us in to the ERM - the U.K still had a £10.7 billion trade deficit in 1994. Exports are growing but imports are growing faster."

"Tragically, there is not a lot to feel good about."

81/95: For Immediate Release: 27 March 1995

MP LASHES GOVERNMENT WITH "CRIMINAL RECORD" JIBE

Recorded crime has more than doubled since 1979 - and only one in four crimes is ever recorded. This was one of the "killer facts" fired off by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, in support of the Labour Party's *"Partners Against Crime"* campaign.

The MP was speaking to a meeting of Labour councillors in Burnley at the weekend when he rounded on the Government's record in combating crime.

The MP said: "The Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, John Maples, said they needed "killer facts". What about these for starters? 5.4m crimes were recorded in England & Wales in the year to June 1994 and only one crime in 50 results in a conviction. It is no wonder that people are counting the cost of crime, both in financial terms and so far as their own peace of mind is concerned. A staggering £3.5bn of property was stolen in England & Wales in 1993 and this has the direct result of forcing up the cost of household contents and motor insurance. In the last five years it has shot up by 20 per cent in real terms."

“Shopkeepers pay through the nose for crime too. It costs retailers £2.15bn a year and another £540m in crime-prevention measures.”

“The Government promised to increase police numbers, but cut them instead. And now they propose citizen patrols, with civilians replacing police officers on the streets. What a state of affairs!”

The MP added: “People who live in high crime areas have a right to expect protection from thieves, muggers and criminals of every sort.”

82/95: For Immediate Release: 27 March 1995

PARK HIGH GETS TOP MARKS FROM MP

Pupils at Park High who put together an exhibition on endangered species won special praise last week from the local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was visiting the school at the invitation of pupil, Clare Ashford, who lives in Earby.

Gordon Prentice said: “I was really impressed by the quality of the displays. The pupils had spent four weeks studying the issue in some detail, unearthing interesting facts and figures and putting together illustrations and photos of the threatened animals. The focus of their investigation was Tanzania in East Africa although they also looked further afield - at creatures, from the snow leopard to the whale, which are in peril world wide.”

“It is so refreshing to hear young people talk knowledgeably and thoughtfully about what we need to do to save the ever growing list of threatened species.”

“I told the students they were a hundred times more radical than their parents! That always gets a laugh.”

83/95: Embargoed until: 28 March 1995

NEW REPORT SHOWS SOARING RISK OF CRIME IN LANCASHIRE

A new report, entitled *Everyone's a Victim,* looks for the first time at the official statistics of crime from the victims' point of view. Based on detailed work by the House of Commons Library it gives detailed figures for the chances of being the victim of crime in each police force area in England and Wales. It shows that in Lancashire:

• The risk of becoming a victim of a home burglary is now 1 in every 12 households - up from 1 in 43 in 1979.

• The risk of an individual becoming a victim of violent crime is now 1 in 119 - up from 1 in 283 in 1979.

• The risk of a car or its contents being stolen is now 1 in every 6 vehicles - up from 1 in 15 in 1979.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "These figures show the extent of the deterioration in law and order under the Conservatives. These levels of victimisation are simply unacceptable.

"What is more, as rates of victimisation have escalated, the Government's principal response has been to make victims pay for the Conservatives' failure to stem the rise in crime. Instead of cutting violent crime, they have sought to cut the help available to victims under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Their professed concern for victims is a hollow sham.

"The Conservatives will never be trusted on crime again. Labour is active in the fight against crime. Crime levels can be reduced when the police, local authorities and the community work together in partnership. We need to put victims and crime prevention at the heart of the criminal justice system."

84/95: For Immediate Release: 28 March 1995

MP WINS BAG FOR REDUCING WASTE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has won a bag for reducing waste. The MP has received a Commendation in the Waste Watch Pledge Awards for his efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle waste.

As well as a Commendation certificate, Gordon Prentice received a cotton reuse bag which will enable him to SNUB (Say No To Unnecessary Bags) when out shopping.

Gordon Prentice was one of 165 MPs including John Major, John Gummer, Margaret Beckett and Paddy Ashdown who signed a Waste Watch Pledge to reduce and recycle their waste in 1993. All the MPs were asked to report back on their success. Gordon Prentice's efforts which included: reusing bottles and jars, buying goods in refillable containers and avoiding buying disposable items, deserved commendation.

Waste Watch director Liz Allen said: "Gordon Prentice is making efforts to put his pledge into action and not only to recycle but to reduce and reuse potential wastes. He is proving that MPs can be environmentally efficient as well as living busy public lives. We hope that his SNUB bag will help him continue the good work!"

First prize in the prestigious awards went to Glanford and Scunthorpe MP Elliot Morley. He received a TigerWorm wormery following his efforts which included sending back Hansard and Parliamentary Order Papers so that they could be read by someone else after him.

Note to Editors: Waste Watch is the national agency promoting waste reduction and recycling through publications, seminars, conferences, providing advice and assistance to local authorities, community groups, the general public as well as businesses and central Government. Household waste in the UK is estimated to stand at around 20 million tonnes each year. The Government recently issued a draft national waste strategy stating that by the year 2000 25% of that waste should be recycled and that waste generated should not rise above 1995 figures.

85/95: For Immediate Release: 29 March 1995

MP SLAMS LOW PAY IN NORTH WEST

The North West is the third worst hit region in the country for low pay. Out of the eleven standard regions in Great Britain only Yorkshire and Humberside and the North are worse off. According to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, there are 45,000 people in the North West who earn less than £1.50p an hour. 155,000 people earn less than £2.50p an hour.

Last week the MP renewed his call for a minimum wage highlighting what he called the "slave labour rates" paid by some firms.

The MP said: "The Conservative Government has over the past fifteen years actively promoted the conditions for unacceptably high pay. The scandal of massive pay increases and share options in the privatised utilities has been exposed. But there is another scandal and this is the plight of millions of people on unacceptably low pay. In Britain today there are 328,000 people in Britain who earn less than £1.50 an hour."

"We need a minimum wage if we are to end such exploitation."

Note to Editors: There are 1,143,000 who earn less than £2.50 an hour. Women are particularly badly hit by low pay - 670,000 women earn less than £2.50 an hour. Every part of Britain has a serious problem of low pay.

The taxpayer now pays £2.44 billion annually for benefits to top up the income of people in work. The Government has cut protection for working people and axed the Wages Councils which gave a minimum pay floor to 2.5 million people.

The independent inquiry into income and wealth by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found:

• There has been a rapidly growing gap between the low paid and the rest of wage earners. The lowest tenth of male hourly earnings are now below their 1975 level while the top tenth are over 50% higher.

• There is no evidence that the low wages received by some younger workers with no post-compulsory education will improve with age.

Low Pay

• The bottom tenth of British male earners are paid 58% of the average wage. In Germany the equivalent figure is 71%; in Italy 75%.

• The bottom tenth of British women workers are paid 61% of the average wage. In Australia the equivalent is 75%; in Sweden 77%.

Women are hit particularly hard by low pay in Britain In the 1990s.

• 74% of the 3.1 million people earning below the National Insurance threshold are women. Low pay condemns women to poverty in old age.

• Women make up less than 1% of Chief Executives and three per cent of directors. (National Management Survey 1993). Half of all workplaces employ only male managers (Equal Opportunities Commission).

• 87% of part-time workers are women. Women part-time workers earn on average just 59%of the hourly pay rates of men who work full time (New Earnings Survey 1994)

86/95: For Immediate Release: 4 April 1995

1 IN 5 YOUNG PEOPLE IN PENDLE ON THE DOLE FOR OVER A YEAR

Shock figures from local MP, Gordon Prentice, show that 17.8% of Pendle's unemployed young people are out of work for over a year. And the number of jobless young people in the Borough is the 5th highest of the North West Region's 20 Travel to Work Areas.

Mr Prentice said: "These statistics are absolutely shocking. It is not just the numbers who have the misfortune to be unemployed but also the length of time they are out of work. How on earth can we expect young people to feel good about a society which condemns thousands of them to a life on the dole?"

The figures - unearthed by the MP from the library of the House of Commons - show the percentage of young people under 25 who have been unemployed for over a year puts Pendle 13th out of 20 in the North West.

The MP continued: "The highest figure for long term youth unemployment is 34.7% in Liverpool. That is over one in three. It is absolutely criminal."

Note to Editors: Tables enclosed

87/95: For Immediate Release: 3 April 1995

LORD PARKINSON BIDS FOR CONTRACT TO BUILD CHANNEL RAIL LINK

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told the House of Commons today that the behaviour of former chairman of the Conservative Party, Lord Parkinson, was "strange and remarkable". The MP said the Tory peer, who is now Chairman of Eurorail, had put in a bid to build the £3 billion Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

The MP said afterwards: "Five years ago, Mr Parkinson, not then elevated to the peerage, spiked plans to build the new rail link on the grounds that railways should not be subsidised by the taxpayer."

"The private sector was unwilling to construct the link without a hefty public subsidy - which some press reports put at £1.5 billion - and along comes Lord Parkinson whose company is one of four now bidding for the subsidised contract."

"The Eurostar train which runs on the London Paris route through the Channel Tunnel is a speeding blur of silver on the French side but it slows down to Thomas the Tank Engine speeds on this side of the channel. We have Lord Parkinson to thank for that."

“How he has the nerve to bid for this contract beats me. His behaviour is not just strange and remarkable. It is blatantly hypocritical.”

88/95: For Immediate Release: 3 April 1995

LET’S HAVE SPORT FOR ALL says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today called on the Government to restore the principle of “Sport for All” to the heart of national and local Sports Council policy.

The Government is shortly due to announce major changes to the work and the structure of the Sports Councils with the aim of concentrating funds on a restricted list of sports and a “commitment to excellence”.

The MP continued: "Sport for All used to be the Sports Council's watchword, yet the Government is now abandoning the idea. How can this country achieve excellence in sport without the solid foundation of mass participation that Sport for All represents? Of course we need to promote the best - but at a time when large sections of the population are less fit than ever before, we need to promote sport for everyone else as well. I am calling on the Government today to recognise this fundamental point, and to abandon their foolish plans to restrict the work and scope of the Sports Councils.”

The MP also backed moves to get sports centres in the Borough. He said: “With campaigns across Pendle for new sports centres, the Government should also be addressing the dire shortage of facilities. Everyone interested in sport loses out but it hits young people harder than most.”

“Local authorities are strapped for cash and they are finding it next to impossible to build the facilities that are clearly needed. Not unreasonably, people are taking a chance with the lottery. I certainly hope West Craven’s number comes up and their bid is successful.”

89/95: For Immediate Release: 4 April 1995

HUNDREDS OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN PENDLE TO LOSE INCAPACITY BENEFIT

The Conservatives’ new Incapacity Benefit will remove over a quarter of a million disabled people from entitlement to benefit over the next two years, according to the Government's own figures. The new Incapacity Benefit will come into being on 13 April.

In Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale (the benefit area district) an estimated 1,700 existing claimants of Invalidity Benefit will lose it along with 400 who would have qualified under the old rules but not under the new.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “These new rules will savagely impact on hundreds of Pendle people with disabilities. It is going to be a desperate time for many folk. Despite all the window dressing from the Government, the plain fact is that, across the country as a whole, over the next two years 220,000 people with disabilities currently claiming invalidity benefit will lose their entitlement to benefit due to the introduction of the new medical test. In addition, 55,000 new claimants a year who

would have qualified for invalidity benefit under the current rules will be found capable of work as a result of the new test."

Note to Editors: How the new Incapacity Benefit works. Incapacity Benefit replaces Sickness and Invalidity Benefits for people with a registered disability or incapacity. It replaces the two existing benefit rates (lower and higher) with three: short-term Incapacity Benefit at a lower rate, 1-28 weeks (£44.40) short-term Incapacity Benefit at a higher rate~ 29-52 weeks (£52.50) long-term Incapacity Benefit after 52 weeks (£58.85)

For the first 28 weeks of incapacity, an employee can claim the lower-rate Incapacity Benefit based on an "own occupation" test (a self-assessment of his/her ability to do the job).

From week 29, the claimant will move on to a higher-rate Incapacity Benefit for as long as he/she remains incapable of work (up to state pension age), **but only if he/she passes the tough new tests.**

Incapacity Benefit

Tough new "All Work" Tests. At the heart of the new Incapacity Benefit are tough new "all work" incapacity tests, designed to screen out hundreds of thousands of people from benefit entitlement, saving £2.25bn from the Social Security budget. The tests are for both physical and mental incapacity and are conducted on a point-scoring basis. Claimants must score at least 15 points in the physical disability test, and at least ten points in the mental disability test.

For instance, "cannot stand unassisted", "cannot bend or kneel as if to pick up a piece of paper from the floor and straighten up again" and "cannot turn the pages of a book with either hand" score 15 points each. But claimants score no points for the following disabilities: *lifting* - cannot pick up and carry a 2.5 kilo bag of potatoes with one hand; *reaching* - cannot raise one arm above his/her head to reach for something; *continence* - loses control of bladder occasionally.

Harsh and unjust - what's wrong with the Incapacity Benefit?

• Some disabled people could lose entitlement to benefit altogether: they could be judged insufficiently disabled to claim Incapacity Benefit, but not sufficiently available for work to qualify for the new Jobseeker's Allowance

• The role of GPs in assessing people's incapacities has been reduced. GPs may be asked to confirm a claimant's medical condition, but not to comment on ability to work. Assessment will instead be done by doctors appointed by the Benefits Agency Medical Service

• the definition of "long-term incapacity" has been changed from 28 to 52 weeks - even though at 28 weeks a claimant will have been assessed, as incapable of all work. This means a loss of £5.10 per week per claimant for 24 weeks (£122)

• Incapacity Benefit for new claimants will be taxable. Only existing claimants covered by transitional protection will retain non-taxable benefits

• From 1 April 1996, tens of thousands of claimants will be transferred from Incapacity Benefit to a Job Seeker's Allowance - at a lower rate of benefit

• People who appeal against losing their right to Incapacity Benefit will automatically have 20 per cent of their benefit deducted as a "disincentive" to appealing. The Government estimates up to 140,000 people are likely to appeal.

90/95: For Immediate Release: 4 April 1995

TAX BURDEN "NEVER BEEN HEAVIER" says MP

The Prime Minister's pledge to cut income tax is nothing other than a sick joke in the week taxes are going up again, according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

This Thursday (April 6th) mortgage interest tax relief and the married couple's allowance are being cut again to 15%. This will add £220 to the annual tax bill of any married household with a mortgage of more than £30,000.

Gordon Prentice commented: "By April 1995 a typical family will be paying £800 more in tax every year than at the time of the last election. This family now pays more of their gross income (35.6%) to the Exchequer than in 1979 under the last Labour Government (32.2%). Astonishingly, only people earning more than £64,000 pay less tax now than in 1979 under Labour."

"Everyone except the super-rich is worse-off under this Government. Tax and mortgage rate increases mean that:

*the living standards of a typical family on average earnings are set to fall by some 2% - £5 a week - over the coming year.

* the living standards of a poorer family on half average earnings are likely to fall by nearly 3% - £4 a week - over the coming year.

* the living standards of a better-off family on one and a half times average earnings are likely to fall by 2% - £6.50 a week - over the coming year."

"Even the Conservatives secretly admit that the living standards of the vast majority are falling. In his now notorious leaked memorandum, John Maples, the Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, confessed that *The rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest who are getting poorer"*

91/95: For Immediate Release: 5 April 1995

MP CALLS FOR END TO SEA DUMPING

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his demand for an inquiry into the dumping of chemical weapons in the Irish Sea. Recent revelations about the extent of the threat have shocked even those used to the secretive ways of the defence establishment.

The MP said: "Now that the initial shock about these disclosures has passed, we need a full inquiry into the issue of chemical dumping. I want monitoring of all the dump sites and a full account of "Operation Sandcastle" which led to the dumping of all this toxic material off the Lancashire coast."

“The assurances we have been given that the dump sites were effectively sealed do not stand up when material that has been dumped is washed up on the shore.” It is as plain as a pike staff that no monitoring of the stability of the dump sites has ever been conducted.”

Note to Editors: In January the Ministry of Defence revealed that between 1945 and 1949 the UK disposed of 120,000 tons of British Chemical Weapons mostly mustard and phosgene gas) in bomb and shell form. Between 1956 and 1957 'Operation Sandcastle' involved the dumping of 71,000 bombs (approx. 25,000 tons) containing the nerve agent TABUN, as well as 330 tons of arsenical compounds.

There were four deep-sea dump sites: between 50 and 100 miles west of the Hebrides, 80 miles northwest of Northern Ireland, 250 miles southwest of Lands End in the Western Approaches, and in Beauforts Dyke in the North Channel (Irish Sea). Concern currently focuses on the Beauforts Dyke dump site. A recent Llverpool University study found levels of arsenic in plaice caught in Liverpool Bay up to ten times greater than normal. There are fears that the dumps pose a threat to the marine environment and the food chain.

Over the last few years 700 anti-tank incendiaries have been washed up on the shores of the Isle of Man, the coast of Western Scotland and of County Antrim in Northern Ireland. These are a great risk to the local population and emit a poisonous gas upon oxidisation.

92/95: For Immediate Release: 5 April 1995

FISH & CHIPS WILL SOON BE “A LUXURY” says MP

Dwindling fish stocks could soon make fish and chips a luxury for most people according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says he is stunned at the extent to which hitherto common fish species have been fished out or are in danger of being fished out.

The MP’s comments come in the wake of the cod war in the North Atlantic with Canada accusing Spain of plundering fish stocks and taking under-sized catches from beyond the 200 mile limit.

The MP said: “The Agriculture Minister, Michael Jack, told me today that on the basis of 1994 scientific assessments, no less than 37% of commercial fish stocks around the UK are at or below the minimum biologically acceptable levels. He tells me the “recruitment” of young fish is insufficient to maintain the size of the stock at current levels.”

“Unless we act now, fish and chips could become a folk memory. We need rigourously to police the quotas to make sure more fish are not taken from the sea than the shoals can support. That means using satellite surveillance and the Royal Navy to ensure fair play.”

“It is simply staggering to think that a fish such as the cod is becoming a rarity.”

Note to Editors: The stocks below minimum biologically acceptable levels:

North Sea:	cod, saithe, plaice, mackerel
Eastern Channel:	cod, whiting, plaice
Western Channel:	sole

Bristol Channel:	cod, sole, plaice
Western waters:	hake, mackerel
Irish Sea:	cod, whiting, sole
West of Scotland:	cod, haddock, saithe, whiting, Clyde herring.

In the case of the North Atlantic stocks of off-shore cod are insufficient for a commercially viable fishery in East and West Greenland.

93/95: For Immediate Release: 5 April 1995

JUDGES SAY CRIMINAL INJURY RULES UNLAWFUL

The flat rate criminal injury compensation payments introduced by the Government last April have today been ruled unlawful by the Law Lords. They say the Home Secretary exceeded his powers and should have sought the authority of Parliament before making the changes.

Under the revised scheme - now held to be unlawful - future loss of earnings and future costs of medical care are excluded completely from damages assessed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board - even when, in the case of badly injured people, they are often the most important losses.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, speaking at Westminster in the wake of today's judgement demanded Michael Howard's resignation. "Howard's scheme was absolutely outrageous. The rules would clearly lead to some ludicrous unfairness in the compensation awarded. For example, under the Government's unlawful scheme a victim of child abuse - below the level of rape - would receive only £1,000, the same amount as for a chipped tooth. A police officer who was seriously injured in a criminal attack in 1993 was awarded £121,000 last year under the existing scheme but would have been entitled to only £7,500 under the unlawful scheme."

"Last Sunday, when I discussed this issue on BBC TV's *Northwestminster* with Tory MP for Blackpool, Nick Hawkins, we were shown leaked correspondence between Ministers which anticipated that today's ruling might go against the Government. Ministers conceded it might be very difficult to get a new scheme through the House of Commons. It would not be *"difficult".* It would be impossible."

94/95: For Immediate Release: 10 April 1995

GOVERNMENT FORCES COUNCIL TAX UP

"People in Pendle are being forced by the Government to pay more Council Tax while getting reduced services" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "As a result of Government policy, people here in Pendle are being forced to pay Council Tax that's way over the current rate of inflation. The Liberal Democrats will point the finger of blame at Lancashire County Council, as they always do, but the County is in exactly the same position as the Borough Council.

"The hike in Council Tax comes on top of all the other tax increases the Tories have piled on local people. And it's going to get worse. According to the Government's own figures, Council Tax payers will be forced to pay out an extra £2.8 billion over the

next three years. That's equal to 1.5p on the standard rate of Income Tax. It means three more years of paying more and getting less.

“This state of affairs is the result of the deliberate policy of the Government. They have set their grant so low that it won't pay for what the Council has been doing up to now. It doesn't make proper allowance for pay increases or inflation. That's why schools are in trouble and teachers' jobs are in danger."

-ends-

Note to Editors: Most parts of the country are experiencing Council Tax increases and cuts in services - so that local people will be expected to pay more and get less. The average Council Tax increase is more than 5 per cent - by far the highest since this tax was introduced to replace the Poll Tax.

The average Council Tax in a Labour area is £37 lower than in a Tory area and £50 lower than in a Liberal area. The average figures are -

Average Council Tax 1995/6

Liberal Democrat	£528
Conservative	£515
Labour	£478

Council Tax

The Tories try to challenge this figure preferring to quote instead the average figure for a particular Council Tax valuation band. However, the overall average used above was used initially by the Department of the Environment until Ministers realised it didn't give the right political message.

The overall average was also the figure used as an official performance indicator in the Audit Commission report on performance indicators published on Thursday 30 March 1995.

The Tory flagship borough of Wandsworth has the biggest increase this year. Most Council Tax payers in Wandsworth, except those in the most expensive Council Tax bands, face an increase of 133 per cent. This results in part from withdrawal of transitional relief given to reduce the impact of Poll Tax abolition.

Liberal Democrat Isle of Wight has the second biggest increase (24.4 per cent) and Berwick on Tweed (No Overall Control) comes third on 23.5 per cent. None of the three councils with the highest Council Tax bill is Labour controlled.

Highest Council Tax Bill 1995/6

Council	Political Control	Council Tax
Richmond on Thames	Liberal Democrat	£740.08
Chiltern	Conservative	£674.25
Elmbridge	No Overall Control	£670.81

All over the country councils are being forced to cut services not as a result of any fault of their own but, as Labour has been saying from the day the grant settlement was announced, because the Government's grant fell short of what was necessary. Even allowing for the extra income from Council Tax increases, the settlement has left

councils as a whole £1.5 billion short of what they were spending in 1994/95. Nor does it make proper allowance for pay increases or inflation.

This has shown up most acutely in education, where schools face having to fund pay increases by getting rid of teachers. They have been advised by Gillian Shepherd to find the money by cutting non-statutory services such as youth clubs and nursery education.

Overall effect

The Council Tax increase taken together with the cuts in services will cost the average householder £120 this coming year - local people will pay more and get less. The Government's own figures assume that over the next three years, takings from the Council Tax will rise by £2.8 billion - equal to 1.5p on the Standard Rate of Income Tax - 3 years of paying more and getting less.

95/95: Embargoed: 10 April 1995

MP PRESSES FOR RESULTS OF LOW FLYING PROBE

Three months after eight RAF Tornados streaked across the skies over Barnoldswick and Earby, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is still waiting for the Defence Secretary to release the results of the official investigation into the MP's claim that the warplanes were skimming the ground and putting lives at risk.

The MP said: "The RAF has got to train their pilots - but not over built up areas of my constituency and not by skimming the rooftops at 500 feet. Although there hasn't been an accident so far over a town or village who is to say it is never going to happen?"

"The records show that since 1981, 17 Tornados have been lost over UK land and 10 over UK sea with the tragic loss of life of 17 RAF flyers and two civilians. Outside UK controlled land and sea, six Tornados were lost in combat in the Gulf, six crashed as a result of aircrew error and three crashed as a result of mechanical or similar failure. Clearly, while we salute the competence, skill and bravery of our RAF pilots we must do all we reasonably can to protect the civilian population from the risk of an accident. In my view there is absolutely no reason whatsoever why sorties should be flown over towns the size of Barnoldswick or Earby."

Note to Editors: The Defence Minister, Christopher Soames MP, told Gordon Prentice the cost of the sortie from RAF Bruggen in Germany on 30 January was £117,000.

A Tornado costs £27 million (at 1994 prices).

96/95: For Immediate Release: 12 April 1995

MP FURIOUS AT ANOTHER HIKE IN TOP SALARIES AT ROLLS ROYCE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted top management at Rolls Royce - whose Barnoldswick plant is in his constituency - for awarding themselves "stratospheric" pay increases while planning to lay off 600 highly skilled research workers at the company's East Kilbride plant in Scotland.

The MP said: "Today's revelations that Rolls Royce Chief Executive, Terence Harrison, received a 21% pay rise taking his salary to £312,000 takes your breath away. He also cashed in share options netting him another £36,000. In 1993 he got an increase of 35% taking his salary then to £230,000."

"The chairman, Sir Ralph Robins, is now on £406,000 which includes a *"performance related bonus"* of £60,000. I well recall the fuss that was made in 1993 when his pay zoomed 24% to £285,000."

"Exhortations to the captains of industry to set an example by moderating the pay and perks packages they award themselves fall on stony ground. An incoming Labour Government will have to get some fairness and equity back onto the agenda - if necessary by using the tax system to rein back these gigantic increases."

97/95: For Immediate Release: 12 April 1995

PENDLE UNEMPLOYMENT HAS COST £112m SINCE JOHN MAJOR BECAME PM

The cost of unemployment in Pendle since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990 stands at a colossal £112,024,500.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has calculated the cost using the official Treasury estimate that it costs the Exchequer £9,000 per year for every unemployed person. This takes into account the savings in unemployment benefit and the taxes which an employed person would be paying.

The MP said: "We all remember the infamous saying from the previous Chancellor, Norman Lamont, that unemployment *"was a price well worth paying"*. In fact, unemployment costs everyone of us an arm and a leg. The drive for full employment should be the centre-piece of any Government's economic policy."

"Gordon Prentice, said: "The cost of unemployment is horrendous - not just to the individual but to the wider community. Last month, Pendle's unemployment cost the Exchequer £1,784,250."

Note to Editors: The number of people in Pendle out of work and claiming benefit last month stood at 2,379 (6.3%) - fractionally down on the February figure of 2,411.

There were 1,837 (10.7%) men and 542 women (3.8%) out of work. There were 117 vacancies at Nelson job centre and 166 at Colne.

100/95: For Immediate Release: 18 April 1995

MP STILL TRYING TO FLUSH OUT DETAILS OF NORTH WEST WATER'S COMMONS CONSULTANCIES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is making another bid to flush out details of North West Water's Parliamentary Consultancy with Conservative MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton. His move comes in the week when the Commons will debate the two Tory MPs - David Tredinnick and Graham Riddick - embroiled in the "cash for questions" affair that first broke in July last year. (The debate is on Thursday 20 April.)

The Pendle MP said: “I received today an invitation from Sir Malcolm Thornton MP, acting as host for North West Water, inviting me to a “tea reception” here at the House of Commons on Tuesday 23 May. I shall accept. It will give me an opportunity to put directly to the directors of the company some of the issues that constituents have raised with me.”

“I will also be asking the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, to explain what is involved in being the company's Parliamentary Consultant and how much Sir Malcolm gets paid. When I pressed Sir Desmond for this information last year he told me it would be a breach of commercial confidence to disclose the arrangements the company has with a third party. Sir Malcolm then told me he had nothing to add to what Sir Desmond said! This simply won't wash. We need to know what MPs do for whom - and how much they get paid. We need more openness and transparency.”

“Why on earth should this information be regarded as commercially confidential? It is absolutely bizarre.”

101/95: For Immediate Release: 19 April 1995

MP TO QUIZ MINISTERS ON PENDLE’S BID FOR REGENERATION CASH

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to quiz Ministers in the Department of the Environment about Pendle Council’s bid for cash from the Government’s *“Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund”*. The MP wants to make sure Pendle doesn’t fail again the second time around. In 1994 when neighbouring councils in Burnley, Hyndburn and Blackburn scooped the jackpot, winning thousands of pounds for their areas, Pendle was left with the wooden spoon.

The Government has just published the new bidding guidance for 95/6 which tell councils and others how they can put together their case for cash from the Challenge Fund.

The MP said: “Pendle Council maintains it was given a nod and a wink by the Government’s regional office in the North West that their bid was a good one and only failed narrowly. I have now asked Ministers if the civil servants in Manchester recommended acceptance - and if they did, why Ministers gave the thumbs down.”

“I don’t want the Council simply to re-heat last year’s offering and serve it up as fresh this time around. I want to see a new approach. I have told the Council that - as always - I stand ready to help if asked. There is a lot of money for Pendle riding on this bid and I don’t want a repeat of last year’s fiasco.”

Last December, the failure of the Liberal led Council’s bid sparked a blazing row when leading Liberal councillors said the MP was to blame. It subsequently transpired that the MP’s help had never been sought by the Council.

Note to Editors: The outline bids have to be submitted to the Government by 16 June and the final bids by 18 September.

102/95: For Immediate Release: 19 April 1995

EQUAL TREATMENT WITH WESTMINSTER WOULD MEAN A £687 COUNCIL TAX REBATE IN PENDLE

If people in Pendle got equal treatment with Westminster they wouldn't need to pay any Council Tax at all! In fact, they would be paid a rebate of £687.

This figure was revealed today by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who said: "Every council gets some help from the Government, but the whole system is a racket. It's designed to pour Government funds into Westminster so the Tory flagship Council can keep down the Council Tax."

"If the Council here in Pendle got the same level of Government help as Westminster per head of population, the Council wouldn't need to levy a Council Tax at all. Instead they could pay out a refund of £687."

"Nobody is suggesting that every council could get the same level of funding that Westminster is getting now - no Government could afford it. But the figure shows that the grant system has become a racket. It needs to be changed and Labour will change it."

Note to Editors: If each local authority in England got the same level of Government funding as the Conservative flagship council, Westminster, then 345 councils (95%) would not need to levy a council tax at all but would be able to pay out a refund. Four councils get more funding than Westminster (the City of London, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham) and 14 could reduce their council tax if treated in the same way as Westminster.

103/95: For Immediate Release: 24 April 1995

MP WINS COMMONS DEBATE ON LOW FLYING OVER BARLICK AND EARBY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to raise the issue of low flying warplanes in a special adjournment debate this Friday (28 April). He will be pressing for answers to the questions that remain outstanding about the eight Tornados that skimmed the roof tops of Barnoldswick and Earby on 30 January. A Defence Minister will reply to the debate.

The MP said: "There are any number of eye-witnesses prepared to tell the Ministry of Defence precisely what happened. People in Barlick and Earby didn't imagine the whole business. We are not talking here about a single plane but eight. The noise is enough to wake the dead."

"I want to see an end to low flying over built up areas of my constituency."

Note to editors: The Defence Select Committee of the House of Commons investigated low flying last year in its report published in July 1994. Evidence submitted to the Committee claimed that: "Although a Government commitment was made in 1991 that the overall amount of low flying over the UK would decrease by more than 10% from 1988 to 1994, the number of flying hours at low level has actually increased in that period. In 1988 when low flying reached its peak volume in terms of numbers of sorties, the number of booked flying hours in the UK Low Flying System was 106,100. In 1993, it had risen to in excess of 107,000 hours. Co-inciding with this, the average time spent at low level on each sortie increased by 31% between 1988 and 1993. (page 22)

104/95: For Immediate Release: 24 April 1995

GOVERNMENT SET TO INCREASE RETIREMENT AGE FOR WOMEN TO 65

The Pensions Bill which raises the state retirement age for women to 65 over a phased period to 2020 starts its passage through the Commons today.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This Bill replaces discrimination against men with indirect discrimination against women who are far less likely than men to have alternative pension arrangements that will allow them to take early retirement. Under the Government's proposals, women under 44 will lose up to £14,976 in today's prices by raising their pension age."

"Under this Government you always end up paying more and getting less. The Pensions Bill means lower payouts from SERPS; a lower basic state pension entitlement for all women over 44 and greater insecurity for anyone approaching retirement."

The MP continued: "The Pensions Bill fails to tackle the widening gap between the poorest and the richest pensioners. Between 1979 and 1991 pensioners' incomes rose on average by 42%, but the top 20% of pensioners saw their income grow by 50% whilst the income of the bottom fifth grew by only 11%. Over 1.4 million single pensioners and a further 230,000 elderly couples are forced to rely on Income Support, giving them an income of £64 plus housing costs for a single person between 60 and 75. But 1 in 4 people - some 570,000 pensioners - who are entitled to claim Income Support do not claim it."

"At the same time the value of the basic pension has also fallen following the Government's decision in 1980 to increase it in line with prices rather than with earnings. In 1977/8 the basic pension's value was 20% of male average earnings. In the early 1990s it had dropped to 15% and by the year 2020 it will be worth less than 9%. If the earnings link had been kept then a married couple would now be over £30 per week better off and a single person almost £20 per week better off." *more follows*

"A person's pension should be both secure and adequate enough to ensure there is no poverty in old age. The basic State Pension should be the basis for that security in retirement.

"In my view, a set retirement date restricts individual choice and sits ill with the modern labour market. I favour a *flexible decade of retirement,* allowing those thinking about retiring to decide what is right for them according to their individual circumstances."

ENDS

Note to Editors: Much of the Bill consists of measures contained in the Goode Committee's report set up to investigate the regulation of pensions in the light of the Maxwell scandal. Labour welcomes this opportunity to strengthen the regulation of pensions. However, many significant recommendations of the Goode Committee have been watered down or distorted. The Bill as it stands is a missed opportunity to provide real security in retirement for everyone.

Value of SERPS reduced The Institute of Fiscal Studies has estimated that the overall effect of the Pensions bill will be to cut the value of the SERPS by half in the long run, following the 1986 reforms which had already substantially reduced its value. This means that many people who are currently paying into SERPS will receive much lower benefits for their contributions than they had expected, with women being particularly badly hit. The government have paid scant regard to their obligations to people who have chosen to provide for their retirement through SERPS.

At the same time the Bill proposes introducing new contracting-out arrangements for occupational pensions which will pave the way for a further expansion of the personal pensions sector. This is in addition to the £9 billion of taxpayers money the government has already spent ~bribing~ people to opt out of SERPS and buy into personal pensions, often at the expense of better occupational schemes.

Security of pensions: powers of the regulator The government has already amended the Bill to limit the powers of the regulator, which were already significantly weaker than suggested by Goode. Ironically the net result of the Bill may be to reduce the amount of standard setting and routine checking by government bodies below what is currently being done. Labour will be seeking to amend the Bill to strengthen pensioners rights to prevent any further Maxwell scandals.

105/95: For Immediate Release: 26 April 1995

NO DECISION ON BYPASS ANGERS MP

The Roads Minister, John Watts MP, has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that he is not able to make a commitment to the Colne/Foulridge Bypass nor give a view on the proposed trunking of the A56 outside a general review of the trunk road system. The last review was in 1994.

The MP met Mr Watts on 27 February after pressing the Minister for a meeting to hear the views of the four local authorities.

Gordon Prentice said: “The Minister’s reply comes as a great disappointment. The Government clearly intends to wait until the M65 - M6 link up is complete before it seriously addresses the issue. But we should be planning now - not after Colne becomes a gigantic bottle-neck with traffic backing up on the M65 at the Vivary Bridge roundabout.”

“I shall not rest until I have persuaded the Minister to visit the area and see for himself. Lines on maps never tell the whole story.”

ends

Note to Editors: The Roads Minister, John Watts MP, wrote to Gordon Prentice MP on 25 April saying:

“Thank you for your letter of 21 March following my meeting with you and the delegation from Lancashire and North Yorkshire District councils *(sic)*, Pendle Borough and Craven District Councils about the M65/A56 trunking issue and funding of Lancashire County Council's proposed Colne/Foulridge Bypass.

I found the meeting valuable and as promised I have looked again at the trunking/detrunking issue. However, whilst I acknowledge the merits of the case put

forward, I can see no pressing reason for proceeding with trunking outside of a more general review of the trunk road network. Nor can I make any commitments to the Colne/Foulridge Bypass.

The Highways Agency will of course monitor closely the traffic flows in the area following the completion of the Blackburn Southern Bypass.

Colne/Foulridge Bypass

As I said in the meeting I will try to include the area in a visit when my diary commitments and Parliamentary business allow."

On 26 April, the Pendle MP replied as follows:

Dear Mr Watts

"I was naturally disappointed to learn from your letter of yesterday that you are not minded to make any commitments to the Colne/Foulridge Bypass nor are you able to proceed with the trunking of the A56 outside a general review of the trunk road network. I know the four local authorities will share my concern that the matter is again to be left hanging in the air.

Nevertheless, I take some comfort from the fact that you acknowledge the merits of the case put forward by the four local authorities and that you will indeed try to visit the area when you are able to find space in your diary. I know the councils would give such a visit the highest priority - even if it were arranged at very short notice. You will know that I would clear my own diary of any other engagements.

Can I now turn to the question of traffic flows you mention in your third paragraph? At our meeting you will recall there was a difference between the highway authority and the Highways Agency on the forecast traffic flows on the road network east of the M65 at Colne. It was left that the two sets of officials would get together and try to agree one set of figures which would then inform the debate. Can I take it that this work is in hand?

You say that the Highways Agency will monitor traffic following the completion of the Blackburn Southern Bypass. Surely the time to plan for the increased traffic is now and not after my constituency has been engulfed in traffic coming off the M65 at Colne, squeezing onto local roads that are quite unable to cope."

106/95: For Immediate Release: 27 April 1995

GOVERNMENT SHOULD SCRAP VICTIM CUTS SAYS PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today added his voice to the growing calls for the Government to scrap plans to cut the compensation given to victims of the most serious violent crimes or risk defeat in Parliament. The MP for Pendle was speaking as Labour launched a national campaign for a fair deal for victims of crime.

The Government's proposed tariff scheme - declared unlawful by the Law Lords earlier this month - will leave many victims receiving a tenth of what they would have received under the old scheme. For example, a woman raped in a near fatal attack who recently received £75,000 under the old scheme, would get just £7,500 under the tariff scheme.

The Government's plans are being introduced despite an increasing risk of becoming a victim of violent crime in Lancashire. In 1979 there was a 1 in 283 risk. It is now 1 in 119.

The MP said: "The Government is making victims pay for its failure to stem the rise of violent crime. Instead of cutting crime they want to cut the help to victims."

"Many victims - including police officers and firefighters - will have their compensation slashed to a tenth of what they would have received under the old scheme. Yet the risk of becoming a victim of violent crime in Lancashire has shot up since the Tories came to power in 1979."

"At the last election, far from pledging to slash the old scheme in half, the Tories boasted about its generosity. They promised to put victims first, but now want to cut the help available to them. It is yet one more broken promise."

107/95: For Immediate Release: 2 May 1995

EQUAL TREATMENT WITH WESTMINSTER WOULD PROVIDE 3,152 EXTRA TEACHERS IN LANCASHIRE

"The Government doesn't allow the same amount of money for educating children here in Lancashire as it does for Westminster. If schools in Lancashire did as well out of the Government's system as Westminster does, we could have 3,152 extra teachers. At that rate our primary schools could get 4 extra teachers and secondary schools as much as 15 extra teachers" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

These figures were revealed today by the Pendle MP, who said: "Everybody in Lancashire knows that our children need the best education possible. But the Government doesn't listen to the needs of Lancashire. Instead the Tories have created a funding system which pours Government funds into Westminster at the expense of schools all over the country.

"Nobody is suggesting that every school could get the same level of funding that Westminster is getting now - no Government could afford it. But the figure shows that the Tories' education system has become a farce. Only the Tories could believe that Westminster should benefit at the expense of everyone here in Lancashire."

108/95: For Immediate Release: 1 May 1995

RAIL SELL-OFF DELAY DENIED

The Minister responsible for the co-ordination and presentation of Government policy, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Hunt, today denied a front page report in this morning's Guardian, suggesting that rail privatisation was to be delayed because it would be impossible to sell the policy to the public this side of a General Election.

The Minister was answering a question from Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who demanded to know if there was any truth in the newspaper report.

The Pendle MP said afterwards: “The fact is, I don't believe anything this lot says. They would sell off their own grannies if they thought it would secure their re-election.”

“The Government say they are committed to sell off the railways and nuclear electric before the election. Both privatisations are fraught with danger and are likely to explode in their hands.”

“They are only pressing ahead to get money for tax cuts before the next election. The Conservatives think they are governing 57 million nodding donkeys who don’t realise what is happening.”

109/95: For Immediate Release: 2 May 1995

THERE’S A HOUSING CRISIS says PENDLE MP

"Whether you own your home or rent, you're worse off under the Conservatives" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster earlier this week, the MP said: "This Government has plunged Britain into a housing crisis. More than a million home owners are trapped in houses they can't sell because they're now worth less than the price they paid for them. Typical mortgage costs have increased by £600 in the last year. In six short years, rents in every sector private, council and housing association - have doubled or nearly doubled.

"Homelessness has shot up, but the number of homes being built has gone down. Yet the Government is deliberately preventing councils from investing money in new and better homes.

"Take the situation here in the North West, there are 51,000 properties which are worth less now than when they were bought. The number of homeless people has gone up by159% since 1979, yet there are fewer council and housing association homes being built. The number of new Housing Association and Council dwellings here in the North West has collapsed from 11,347 to 4,326 in the period 1979 - 1994. That’s a fall of 62%.

"This Government won't do anything about it. But the Opposition will. Labour will allow councils to invest money in a new housebuilding programme. That won't only provide homes for the homeless. It will also create thousands of new jobs to help get Britain back to work."

-ends-

Note to Editors: Tory housing policies mean that, whether you are a owner or a tenant, you pay more and get less. At the same time councils are being prevented by Tory dogma from investing in new homes. The result is an acute housing crisis in Britain.

- 295,000 homeowners have had their homes repossessed over the past five years.

Housing Crisis

- 1,200,000 homeowners are trapped in negative equity.

• 160,000 households were officially recorded as homeless last year.

• 1,800,000 homes are officially unfit for human habitation, and 3,800,000 need urgent repairs.

PRIVATE MARKET STAGNANT AND CONFIDENCE LOW

• house sales in March were 14% down on 1994. prices are static or falling.

• homeowners are facing serious increases in their repayment costs - up over £800 on average between January 1994 and October 1995 as a result of interest rate rises, two cuts in MIRAS and the threatened withdrawal of the Income Support Safety net.

INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL HOUSING CUT

• Last year less than 2,000 council homes were built in the whole of Britain compared with an average of 110,000 a year when Labour was last in power.

• Following two successive years' cuts in the Housing Corporation budget, the number of new homes for rent started by housing associations is likely to be only around 20,000 this year.

• With councils now effectively stopped from building homes, this will mean that 1995 sees the lowest output of new homes for rent in any year since the Second World War.

• The renovation of older and substandard council estates has also been badly affected by cuts in total council investment -down from over £7 billion in 1979/80 to a estimated £2.5 billion in 1995/96.

STEEP INCREASES IN RENT

• The average council rent this year will be £38.27, compared with £5.90 in 1979. Rents have risen by three times the rate of inflation over the past five years.

• Average housing association rents on new lettings are now £54.09. This has increased by 85% over the past five years, compared with a 27% increase in the RPI.

• As a result of steep rent increases in all tenures, the cost of Housing Benefit has rocketed from £4.1 billion in 1988/89 to over £10 billion.

The Tories who used to claim that Housing Benefit would 'take the strain' of rising rents are now proposing to make cuts in Housing Benefit which will expose thousands of tenants to debt and homelessness.

HOUSING AND JOBS HELD BACK BY TORY DOGMA
Councils in England and Wales have over £6 billion in capital receipts which they are prevented from investing by Tory dogma. Relaxing those restrictions and allowing councils to invest their receipts would not only

more new and improved homes to meet needs. It will also help economic recovery. House building and renovation are labour-intensive industries. They also generate

demand for a range of products, not just bricks, cement and tiles. House building and renovation increases demand for kitchen and bathroom fittings, central heating, boilers pipes and radiators, glass, electrical fittings, paint wallpaper, curtain, carpets and furniture.

A NEW HOUSEBUILDING PROGRAMME

Labour Councils and a Labour Government will give a high priority to increased housing investment and to restoring confidence in the market. Labour will act to tackle the huge housing problem we will inherit and to give to every member of our society the prospect of a decent home at a cost they can afford. This will not only provide more homes for the homeless. It will help get Britain back to work.

Attached are regional details of households in negative equity, homelessness acceptances and council and housing association dwellings.

110/95: For Immediate Release: 1 May 1995

MP DENOUNCES "CIVIC VANDALISM"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today accused Pendle Council of "civic vandalism" in removing stone flags from pavements in Barnoldswick. The Council is currently ripping up the flags in Park Avenue - where the MP lives - and laying replacement tarmac.

Gordon Prentice said: "There has been a tremendous outcry in the past over this policy of taking up perfectly good flags and laying cheap, sticky tarmac which has no aesthetic value whatsoever. I thought this policy had been abandoned and I simply couldn't believe my eyes when the flags on one side of Park Avenue disappeared in a puff of blue smoke. To add insult to injury there were signs at both ends of the street advertising the flags for sale. This is nothing other than daylight robbery."

The outraged MP continued: "The town's pavements have been systematically plundered of flags which are in harmony with the surroundings. It is not as if they are being laid in other parts of the town or in other, more sensitive, locations. They are simply being levered out of the ground and flogged off to anyone who is passing. No-one living in the street was even consulted."

The MP said: "I want to know who on earth is responsible for this civic vandalism. I want to know how much it costs to rip up the flags and lay tarmac. Who sanctioned this dutch auction of flags from my street and who is pocketing the proceeds?"

"There is even talk of the pavements being dug up again by the utilities as soon as this newly laid tarmac has cooled. It is simply unbelievable that the town is being robbed of its attractive stone sets and getting this cheapskate substitute."

"I suppose this is pavement politics with a vengeance."

111/95: For Immediate Release: 2 May1995

MP PRESSES FOR CHANGE IN PAVEMENT POLICIES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, wants to see local residents consulted before their flagged pavements are ripped up and replaced with tarmac. He is pressing Lancashire County Council to leave the flags alone unless they are in a dangerous condition.

The MP said: “I accused Pendle Council of civic vandalism earlier this week but I hit the wrong target - it is the county that’s to blame. Pendle acts as agent for the County and actually disagrees with the policy it is obliged to carry out. I clearly owe my own council an apology.”

“The current policy is justified on grounds of cost effectiveness. The result is unsightly and it is quite appalling that local residents are not consulted.”

“I am told that the computer programme at County Hall calculated that Park Avenue in Barnoldswick had apparently one of the worst scores for the condition of the footpath. This simply does not match the evidence of my own eyes.”

“The county’s foothpaths policy is crying out to be changed.”

112/95: For Immediate Release: 1 May 1995

MP DEMANDS BAN ON WARPLANES OVER BUILT UP AREAS

There should be a total ban on low flying by military aircraft over built up areas says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

In a debate last Friday in the House of Commons the Pendle MP called on the Armed Forces Minister, Nicholas Soames, to stop warplanes flying over his constituency at rooftop height.

The MP said: "Does it take a tragic accident to force a rethink? Last September a Tornado crashed into a hillside in Perthshire and it was a second away from a school playground with 16 children playing. Eight Tornados skimmed over Barnoldswick and Earby on 30 January and the Minister told me the planes were supposed to fly between the two towns. The plain fact is they didn't. They flew over the towns - screaming above houses at little more than rooftop height”

"The Minister hinted that any criticism is, in a sense, unpatriotic. This is absurd. We all recognise the skill, professionalism and courage of our RAF pilots but we also have the right to insist the powers that be in the Ministry of Defence lay down proper guide-lines which should outlaw overflying all built up areas.”

"There have been 17 Tornado crashes over land in the UK since 1981 and it is madness to court disaster by allowing these planes to fly over towns the size of Earby. I say again, it is simply not on."

113/95: **Embargoed:** 10.30pm 4 May 1995

WEST CRAVEN WINS THE JACKPOT

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed the news that £700,000 of National Lottery money is coming to West Craven. “This is absolutely marvellous news. It’s a real boost for the area.”

“Credit must go to everyone involved in working up the bid - and for the local council in putting up the pump priming money. This is a facility that is sorely needed and everyone will benefit.”

The MP added: “Everyone is thrilled.”

114/95: For Immediate Release: 12 May 1995

MP PROBES BURNLEY EYE TRAGEDY

The tragedy at Burnley General Hospital in which three patients each lost an eye should be the subject of a full inquiry by the Health Secretary according to Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

The MP also wants the Medical Devices Agency - the body which certifies medical equipment as being fit for use - to look at the ophthalmic probe which caused the damage.

The MP said: "What can anyone say about this terrible tragedy? From what I am told, the doctors at Burnley followed the manufacturer's instructions to the letter when sterilising the probe and yet it was still contaminated. Clearly, we need further details from the manufacturer about the safety margins for sterilisation and we will also want to know from the Medical Devices Agency what tests and checks, if any, they carried out on this piece of equipment."

"Everyone must feel the greatest sympathy for the people who lost eyes. It is simply unbelievable that this sort of thing can happen."

Note to Editors: In response to questions raised by Gordon Prentice, the Chief Executive of Burnley Health Care Trust, David Chew, told the Pendle MP on 10 May:

"The situation is that 4 patients underwent routine cataract surgery at BGH on 10th April and following surgery 3 patients developed eye infections. Immediately our Infection Control Team headed by Dr. S. Dealler, Consultant Microbiologist were called in to identify the cause of the infection. Following an exhaustive investigation it was found that the probe and tubing which is inserted into the eye and used to pass irrigation fluid across the eye during surgery had become contaminated with a bacteria known as pseudomanas aeruginosa. This had happened despite the fact that the probe had been sterilised between cases in accordance with the advice received from the equipment supplier. This equipment and the related procedure has been in wide use across the NHS for several years."

"Whilst the investigations were proceeding the Consultant Ophthalmologist working in close liaison with the Consultant Microbiologist was deciding the most appropriate form of treatment for the 3 patients affected. Advice was obtained from Moorfields Eye Hospital, London and a second opinion

was given by the Eye Hospital in Manchester in respect of one of the patients. The most appropriate antibiotic drugs were prescribed, however, the patients failed to respond and regrettably the Consultant concluded that the only recourse was to surgically remove the affected eyes. Patients and their relatives were each seen and advised accordingly and the last operation was performed on the 5th May."

"In parallel with the above action we have advised the equipment supplier of the situation and also the Medical Devices Agency who have a responsibility on a national basis to investigate this type of incident. It is interesting to note that both ourselves and the Medical Devices Agency have been contacted by other hospitals using the same sterilising process as ourselves. As a result of what has happened and following a review by our experts we have completely changed the sterilising procedure so that this cannot be repeated."

"This has been a devastating experience for all concerned and whilst all that can be done has been done to safeguard patients in the future we are left with knowing that nothing further can be done medically to restore vision to the affected eyes."

115/95: For Immediate Release: 15 May 1995

MP TO VISIT AMBULANCE HQ

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet Lancashire Ambulance Service Chief Executive, David Hill, the coming Friday (19 May) at his Preston HQ to discuss concerns about local ambulance cover in Pendle.

The MP said: "I want to reassure myself that the changes that were brought in on 1 April will provide my constituents with the service they have a right to expect. Ambulances can mean the difference between life and death. We want the best possible service - and one with enough built-in flexibility to cope with the unexpected."

Cover is provided for the Pendle area from Burnley, Barnoldswick and Nelson Ambulance Stations with primary back-up from Clitheroe and Altham Ambulance Stations and secondary back up from Accrington.

ends

Note to Editors: The Ambulance Service Chief Executive, David Hill, told the MP:

"The new Automatic Ambulance Tracking System which has now been introduced into the Control Room at Broughton does now mean that we are much more able to deploy our ambulances across the County to provide the best possible cover arrangements in all areas. This has been helped because the Controller has a pictorial display of the location of all ambulances on an Ordnance Survey map which is updated every 13 seconds and allows the tracking of all ambulances and the ability to modify the cover provided across the County on a minute by minute basis.

"At Burnley, Barnoldswick and Nelson Ambulance Stations we have increased the total number of ambulances on days from 5 to 6 and from 3 to 4 in total at Clitheroe and Altham. This increase was brought about recently through some minor changes to cover during the quiet hours of the night when an ambulance from Burnley and Altham was transferred onto the more busy day-time period. This followed a review by a firm of consultants, Operational Research in Health, who are acknowledged leaders in the field. During the quiet hours of the night (0200 - 0800) the average number of calls throughout the County is less than 6 per hour, compared with a peak of around 24 calls per hour at midday.

"As a result we now operate with 3 ambulances during the quiet hours of the night in total at Burnley, Barnoldswick and Nelson with a further 2 ambulances in total at Clitheroe and Altham. This enables us to provide a
much improved service for emergency and urgent calls during the busy period of the day whilst still maintaining acceptable night-time cover.

"These changes were brought in from 1 April 1995 and are showing improvements to responses during the day with no particular problems in providing acceptable night-time cover.

116/95: For Immediate Release: 12 May 1995

MP WELCOMES NOLAN REPORT

The Nolan Report on standards of conduct in public life has been welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP told the Prime Minister in the Commons yesterday (the day of publication) that it was "quite wrong for Ministers to move seamlessly from the Cabinet Room to the Board Room lining their pockets in the process".

Prentice said: "I told the Prime Minister that a tide of sleaze had engulfed his Government. He can now do nothing other than adopt the report in its entirety."

The MP added: "There are some useful local spin-offs from Nolan. At long last we shall soon know what the Conservative MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton does for North West Water to warrant the accolade *"Parliamentary Consultant"*. I have been pressing Sir Malcolm and NWW chief Sir Desmond Pitcher to tell me what the MP does and how much he gets paid. They have steadfastly refused to tell me, sheltering behind bogus *"commercial confidentiality"*. My constituents - most of whom pay through the nose for North West Water - have a right to know. And soon they will."

Note to Editors: There will be a debate on the Nolan Report in the Commons next Thursday (18 May).

117/95: For Immediate Release: 15 May 1995

HARRODS OWNERS GRANTED CITIZENSHIP REVIEW

The regulars at the Alma Inn, Laneshawbridge, will be toasting the news that the Egyptian born owners of Harrods, Mohammed and Ali Fayed, have won a judicial review of the Home Secretary's decision to turn down their applications for British citizenship. Publican, Mr Dennis Howells, hit the headlines a fortnight ago when the Harrods boss arranged for a delivery of a crate of Harrods beer to the Inn as a thank you for their support.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, hailed the decision to review the citizenship application. I wrote to the Home secretary to ask him to give the reason why he blackballed the Fayeds. I said the reasons should be made public - in cases where the applicants for citizenship were content for this to happen. He refused."

"The courts will now have a close look at the whole issue. Clearly, it would be quite intolerable for a citizenship application to be turned down for political reasons - which is what everyone suspects is the case here."

Note to Editors: The FT wrote on 14 May: The Fayed brothers' dispute with the Government began in 1987 when the Department of Trade and Industry mounted an investigation of their takeover of the House of Fraser group. It came to a head last year, when Mr Mohammed fayed alleged that two Conservative MPs - Mr Tim Smith and Mr Neil Hamilton - had asked Parliamentary questions on his behalf in exchange for cash and hospitality. Mr Smith resigned his post as a parliamentary private secretary; Mr Hamilton denied taking cash for questions but quit his Ministerial job after details emerged of his stay at Mr Fayed's Ritz Hotel in Paris. Last October, Mr Howard rejected claims that he intervened in the citizenship applications made by the two brothers.

118/95: For Immediate Release: 15 May 1995

FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is stepping up his campaign to get Lancashire County Council to change its policy of replacing paving flags with tarmac as a cost cutting measure. A fortnight ago the MP - and his neighbours in Park Avenue, Barnoldswick - were stunned when workmen appeared without warning and started levering the flags out of the ground, selling them to passers-by.

The MP said: "Pendle's Chief Executive told me that the local council was merely acting as agents for Lancashire County Council. Apparently, local councillors tour the area and inspect the footpaths listed in the County programme. They must have been walking about with their eyes closed when they visited my street where the flags were generally in pretty good shape."

"I am asking Pendle Council to consult residents before any action is taken in future to remove flags. Clearly, the councillors on their own are not doing the business. And, as part of the post local government reorganisation settlement, I am also asking the County to pass responsibility for pavements down to the Borough Council. It is plainly absurd that pavements should be a County responsibility."

"The Liberals who, after all, represent the area on Pendle Council, have been strangely silent about the civic vandalism of my street. Who inspected Park Avenue? Who decided the flags should go? We are told that the new Liberal Council will consult people in future. Did no-one suggest doing this before? Was it ever considered? It sounds to me as if people are closing the stable door after the horse has bolted."

Note to editors: In the Town Crier of 12 May 1995, Liberal Councillor David Whipp said: "Recently site inspections have taken place in Park Avenue and Leonard Street and the majority view of those present was to replace the existing flags with tarmac. Sadly their decision is binding. Under our "Going Local" policy all this is set to change. In future residents will be consulted on issues such as this."

119/95: For Immediate Release: 15 May 1995

"BROKEN EMBARGO" ROW GOES TO WESTMINSTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has vowed to get the Lottery rules tightened up following the breach of a press embargo by Pendle's Liberal Democrats who issued a leaflet about the successful £680,000 bid for a Sports Hall in Barnoldswick 24 hours before voting in the local elections.

The embargo had been set for after the close of poll on Thursday evening but the Liberal Party agent, Cllr David Whipp, disregarded it, telling the Craven Herald newspaper: *"It was just brilliant news and we didn't want to keep it to ourselves. I don't feel as if we've done anything wrong."*

In the Commons today, the Pendle MP told the Heritage Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, the Pendle Liberals had hijacked the news and had casually broken a press embargo that was supposed to hold until the close of voting. Prentice told the Minister: "Thousands of leaflets were distributed the eve of the election with the Liberals claiming credit for the good news."

Afterwards, the MP said: "This was a serious breach of trust. I knew about the successful bid before polling day and naturally I was thrilled to bits but the idea of my Party using this information in an election leaflet didn't even cross my mind."

"What is done is done and I do not want to rake over the coals. Nevertheless, I am very concerned that it should not happen again - either here in Pendle or elsewhere. As soon as I saw the Liberal leaflet I raised the issue with the Heritage Secretary, Stephen Dorrell. I will now be pressing for Lottery announcements to be made well outside election periods. It is now obvious that announcements of successful bids can be highjacked and used for crude electioneering purposes."

Note to Editors: On 4 May, Gordon Prentice asked the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he would review the rules governing the release of information concerning bids for lottery money insofar as this may happen in election periods. Stephen Dorrell replied: There are no special rules

Broken Embargo

relating to the release of information concerning bids for lottery money during election periods. As is the case throughout the public service, the lottery distributing bodies are expected to take particular care during election periods to ensure that their actions are politically impartial.

120/95: For Immediate Release: 15 May 1995

MP SLAMS NUCLEAR SELL-OFF

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed the Government's decision to privatise the nuclear industry.

The MP said: "This has got absolutely nothing to do with energy policy or industrial strategy. It is a cynical, short-term move to raise money now to give back in tax bribes before the next election. The Tories are bribing the electorate with our own money."

"Far from promoting the consumer interest, nuclear privatisation will almost certainly do the reverse: the Electricity Consumers' Committee reported last week that consumers have already been massively overcharged for their electricity since the privatisation of the industry.

“There could be a conflict between short-term private profit and the long-term interests of public safety and the environment. The consequences don’t bear thinking about.”

Note to Editors: The Government proposes to:

• privatise the more modern nuclear stations - seven Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors and the Pressurised Water Reactor, Sizewell B

• Leave the older, Magnox power station in the public sector, and eventually transfer them to BNFL

• create a holding company, based in Scotland, with two separate nuclear subsidiaries, Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear.

• bring forward the abolition of the nuclear levy, which Michael Heseltine says will cut the average annual household electricity bill by £20.

The publicly-owned, publicly-accountable nuclear industry is well run, safe, tightly-regulated and efficient. There is no reason to privatise it.

Furthermore, ending the nuclear levy has nothing to do with privatisation - it could just as easily be brought forward while leaving the nuclear industry in the public sector

The sale may raise up £3 billion for the Treasury. But taxpayers paid

£3 billion to build Sizewell B, so private investors will be getting the other seven power stations effectively for free.

Taxpayers will be left with the enormous bill for the decommissioning of the Magnox stations and for the management of the nuclear waste that accrues.

While consumers may save £20 a year on their electricity bills from the ending of the nuclear levy, any savings will be more than outweighed by the costs of decommissioning and waste management.

The promise of new headquarters in Scotland is a sham. In reality, the privatisation means that Scottish Nuclear will be swallowed up in the new company. There will be shiny new brass name plates on the doors, but the operation will really be run from London.

This privatisation is deeply unpopular with the public, who are seriously concerned about the safety implications of handing over nuclear power stations to private businesses, which are more concerned with profit than the public interest.

A confidential Tory poll showed that four out of ten Tory Party members are opposed to nuclear privatisation.

121/95: For Immediate Release: 15 May 1995

MP SAYS PEOPLE “BEING FORCED INTO PRIVATE INSURANCE”

There has ben a massive growth in private insurance as people try to protect themselves against growing feelings of insecurity says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: “People are having to fork out a small fortune to insure themselves against this Government. Since 1979 crime has doubled so that more people spend money protecting themselves against the effects of crime. They are being forced to take out increasingly expensive insurance policies. And the threat of unemployment means more people are taking out protection against income loss.”

“Even though insurance of all kinds is increasingly seen as a necessity by many people, and the cost of insurance premiums has risen, from October 1994 the government introduced a new **Insurance Premium Tax** of 2.5% on individual's payments to insurance companies. Once again, people are being for to pay more and get less in return.”

“The government's relentless erosion of the social insurance principle means more and more people are taking out private insurance policies in areas where the state would previously have provided cover. The introduction of **Incapacity Benefit** greatly reduced the coverage of the two benefits it replaced - Invalidity Benefit and Sickness Benefit - and cut benefit rates for most claimants causing more people to take out Permanent Health Insurance.”

“The Jobseekers Allowance will halve the amount of time people will be eligible to non-means tested unemployment benefits - so more people will be forced to look to private insurance policies.”

“The government's proposed cuts in **Income Support for homeowners** will mean that anyone taking out a new mortgage after 1 October 1995 will not be eligible for Income Support

Insurance

payments for the first 9 months of unemployment. This means that anyone who is applying for a new mortgage from this summer onwards - including people who are moving house and people re-mortgaging their existing property - are unlikely to get a loan unless they take out private mortgage protection Insurance.”

“It is a real witches brew of nasty policies. A General Election will provide the only effective remedy” quipped the MP.

122/95: For Immediate Release: 17 May 1995

MP DEPLORES “CASUAL DISREGARD” OF PRESS EMBARGO BY LIBERALS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today tabled a Commons motion criticising the “casual disregard” of a press embargo by Pendle’s Liberal Democrats. The embargo sought to prevent news of the successful bid for lottery cash for the Sports Hall in West Craven being released on the eve of the local elections where the information could influence the way people vote.

The MP said: “I raised the matter on the floor of the House on Monday with the Heritage Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, but I have also tabled a Commons motion to give

as much exposure as possible to what the Liberals did. And for the Liberal Agent to say they had done nothing wrong really takes the biscuit. Just imagine the cascade of vitriol we could have expected from the Liberals had another party broken the embargo."

"I have also written to the Heritage Secretary pressing him to act."

Note to Editors: The Early Day Motion reads:

Pendle Liberals and press embargoes

This House utterly deplores the casual disregard by Pendle's Liberal Democrats of a firm and explicit press embargo on news of the successful National Lottery bid which will bring £680,000 to Barnoldswick to help finance a new sports hall; notes that the embargo was meant to hold until 10.30pm on Thursday 4 May, polling day for the local elections, but was breached by the Liberals on 3 May when they distributed thousands of leaflets claiming sole credit for the good news; further notes that the embargo was honoured by the Labour and Conservative parties and by independent candidates in the election; deplores the comments of the Liberal election agent that the news was just brilliant and they didn't want to keep it to themselves and that they had done nothing wrong; considers that this is entirely typical of the Liberals in Pendle; calls on the Government to introduce new rules preventing such Lottery announcements being made in and close to election periods and notes that the Liberal Democrats won overall control of Pendle Council on 4 May.

123/95: For Immediate Release: 17 May 1995

THE SPIN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing this Sunday on Granada Television's new political programme, The Spin. He will be commenting on political developments in the week ahead.

The Spin is broadcast on Sunday at 11.00pm.

124/95: For Immediate Release: 18 May 1995

PENDLE JOBLESS DOWN A FRACTION

The April jobless total in Pendle stood at 2,360 - down 19 from March. Male unemployment was 1,795 (8.4%) and female 565 (3.7%).

There were 147 vacancies at Nelson Job Centre and 214 at Colne.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Unemployment seems to be bottoming out at around 2,300 - 2,400. Every fall in the jobless total is welcome but we are still carrying a level of unemployment which is about 600 higher than when John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990."

"The cost to the nation of unemployment in Pendle last month was £1,770,000."

Note to Editors: Official estimates of the cost of keeping one person unemployment for a year is £9,000 (in benefit and lost taxes etc)

126/95: For Immediate Release: 22 May 1995

ROADS MINISTER TO VISIT PENDLE

Roads Minister, John Watts MP, is coming to Pendle on Monday, 5 June, to inspect the A56 and have a close look at the area's traffic problems. He has asked local MP, Gordon Prentice, to accompany him and point out the trouble spots along the route.

The Pendle MP said: "I am obviously heartened that the Minister has accepted my invitation to visit Pendle and look for himself. We will be travelling from Skipton along the A59, onto the A56 through Earby, Foulridge and Colne, taking the North Valley Road to the Vivary Bridge roundabout and the end of the motorway."

"I have asked the council to set up a meeting along the route to give our local councillors an opportunity to discuss the issues directly with the Minister."

"There is still a tremendous amount of work to be done in convincing the Minister to give the go-ahead for a by-pass. In his letter to me he accepts that there will be increased traffic flows at Colne following the completion of the M65-M6 link but he says these do not warrant the much sought after by-pass. This is naturally disappointing but we must keep making the case."

Note to Editors: In his letter to Gordon Prentice of 19 May the Minister says: "...On the question of traffic flows on the A56, I can confirm that the Highways Agency have fully accepted Lancashire's figures for existing flows on this road. There will be some increase in traffic flows on the A56 at Colne as a result of completion of the M65 Blackburn Southern By-pass. The highways Agency's view is that this increase will be small. The local authorities have suggested that a larger increase in flows may result, but not to the extent that would alter the views that I conveyed in my letter of 25 April." (That indicated that any decision would have to wait until the next review of the trunk road network - date as yet unknown).

127/95: For Immediate Release: 22 May 1995

ONE AND A HALF MILLION FEWER JOBS IN THE ECONOMY says PRENTICE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused the Government of "conjuring with the jobless figures". Last week. the Department of Employment announced a further fall in their claimant count of unemployed people - the twentieth in the last two years.

The announcement comes only a few weeks after the independent Royal Statistical Society (RSS) heavily criticised the way the Government used the figures, suggesting that the headline number could underestimate Britain's jobless by at least 150,000.

Commenting on the RSS report and the latest figures, local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "According to the Department of Employment, there are now 2,360 claimants in my constituency. That is the number of people who are both unemployed and eligible to claim benefits. It is not a reflection of the number of people without work. It is not, as the Government have consistently claimed, the number of people who are unemployed."

"Since 1989, 1.5 million jobs have been lost in the economy - jobs that have not been replaced in the Government's so-called "recovery". There are 122,000 fewer full-time jobs now than two years ago. More than 700,000 people are working in temporary positions because they cannot find a permanent job. There has been a 303,000 increase in the number of people employed part-time. 1.2 million people need more than one job to make ends meet.

"It is these issues that the Government should be tackling. It should be working to reduce insecurity at work and to create jobs for those without work. Gloating about dubious figures helps no-one and shows that the Government is simply out of touch and doesn't care."

128/95: For Immediate Release: 22 May 1995

PENDLE MP WANTS NOLAN IMPLEMENTED "WITHOUT DELAY"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says the Nolan Report should be implemented without delay and not "kicked into the long grass" by the Government. He said it would be an absolute disgrace if the Government colluded with backbench Tories to frustrate speedy implementation of the report.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "The Conservative MPs at Westminster have totally undermined confidence in Parliament. Cash for questions; cash for amendments; luxury stays at the Ritz bankrolled by other people; Ministerial resignations ten a penny and Government benches awash with lucrative consultancies, the details of which are shrouded in secrecy. It cannot go on."

The Pendle MP confessed: "It has got to the state where I am embarrassed to say I am a Member of Parliament. Tory sleaze is tainting us all."

Note to Editors: The Nolan Report into Standards in Public Life is a thorough condemnation of the Government and the way it has contributed to the decline in standards of public life over the last 16 years. The Nolan Inquiry was established because of public concern over:

•MPs receiving cash for tabling Parliamentary Questions

•the practice of ex-Ministers being appointed to the boards of companies they privatised, or were involved in while in office

•the proliferation of unaccountable quangos and the politically-motivated appointments to quangos by the Tories

•the role and influence of lobbying companies in Parliament, and their links with MPs.

Before Lord Nolan was appointed to head this inquiry, Public Services Minister, David Hunt, said these matters were "slurs, innuendoes and downright lies". But the Nolan Report has vindicated many of Labour's concerns about these issues and has adopted most of Labour's recommendations.

The Nolan Recommendations The main recommendations of the Nolan Report are:

• A Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards should be appointed to monitor, advise and investigate standards by MPs

• A Code of Conduct for MPs should be drawn up

• Full disclosure of MPs' consultancy agreements and payments, and of trade union sponsorship and payments, should be made immediately

• MPs should be banned from working for lobbying companies

• For two years after leaving office, Ministers should be subject to clearance from an independent advisory committee before joining private companies - the same as for senior civil servants

• An independent Public Appointments Commissioner should be appointed to regulate, monitor and report on public appointments to quangos and other public bodies.

Labour's proposals Labour's evidence to the Nolan Inquiry went further than the Nolan Report recommendations. Labour proposes a new Governance of Britain Act, which will include: •A statutory Code of Conduct for Ministers and public servants •Statutory restrictions on Ministers taking up directorships with privatised utilities and companies with which they have dealt while in office •A register of the financial, political and other interests of all quango members •New arrangements to ensure better Parliamentary and public accountability of quangos and Next Step agencies •A new regime for the funding of political parties
•Statutory restrictions on the use of public money for party political purposes •A single Government Statistical Office, separate from individual Ministries, for all official statistics.

There's no let-up in the Prime Minister's campaign of "errors" against the Labour Party. On Tuesday, he accused Labour of refusing to implement the Home Affairs Select Committee Code of Practice on party funding *(Hansard, 16* May 1995, col 145). This is untrue. The Tories have failed to implement the code of practice, while Labour has gone much further than the Select Committee requires. Labour requires all donations of £5,000 or more to be declared. The Tories, on the other hand, have yet to declare where the £17m that bankrolled their last General Election came from.

Funding of political parties Labour has given its full support to the Nolan Inquiry and welcomes the recommendations of the Nolan Report. But this is not the end of it. Lord Nolan has chosen next to examine the House of Lords. But the Nolan Committee should really next be looking at the issue of funding for political parties - especially the secrecy surrounding donations to the Conservative Party, and the connections between secret financial donations, favours and patronage. The Tories have resisted this, and Lord Nolan has decided that to inquire into party funding in the run-up to a General Election would be too contentious.

Labour has nothing to fear from such an inquiry. The Opposition's financial links with trade unions are open and declared.

129/95: For Immediate Release: 22 May 1995

MPs SAY WIGGIN SHOULD GO BEFORE THE PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

The cash for amendments affair should be referred to the Committee of privileges says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who tonight tabled a Commons motion comparing the treatment meted out to the cash for questions pair, Graham Riddick and David Tredinnick, with Sir Jerry Wiggin who escaped with a ticking off from the Speaker. The motion will appear in tomorrow's Commons Order Paper.

The motion, supported by over 50 Labour MPs, wants the Committee of Privileges to consider today's statement by the Weston Super Mare MP.

Prentice said: "Where is the fairness or equity in all this? Riddick and Tredinnick after apologising to the House were suspended without pay for 10 and 20 days, their reputations as Members of Parliament stained and damaged beyond repair. Yet along comes the latest sleazy Tory MP, Jerry Wiggin, who sails through it all with an apology. What happens next time round? the Wiggin case sets a precedent where an apology, setting out the full facts of the case, will suffice.

"The reputation of Parliament - or what is left of it - will suffer a hundred times more if a lid is put on the Wiggin case rather than having it referred to the Committee of Privileges."

Note to Editors: The Early Day Motion proposed by Gordon Prentice MP is supported by Alice Mahon MP, John Austin Walker MP, Bill Michie MP, David Winnick MP, Nigel Spearing MP and others. It reads:

"That this House records its deep concern that, since the Hon Members for Colne Valley and Bosworth were suspended without pay from the service of the House for 10 and 20 days respectively, following an investigation by the Committee of Privileges, the personal statement made on 22 May 1995 by the hon Member for Weston Super Mare should also be referred to that Committee for its consideration."

130/95: For Immediate Release: 23 May 1995

PROFITS FLOODING INTO NORTH WEST WATER

News that the privatised utility North West Water has increased pre-tax profits from £269m to £284m means there is no excuse for the company to defer much needed improvement work in the Pendle area according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "North West Water is awash with cash earning £778,000 a day in profits which are up 5.6% on last year. We are all fed up to the back teeth of the way in which these privatised monopolies behave - colossal pay increases for board members while the poor old customer is soaked."

"When the company's profits were announced this time last year, I said I wanted to see the problems of flooding at Barrowford sorted out once and for all. I also wanted to see action at Foulridge which is still home to the leakiest main in Lancashire. It burst twice in 1988, once in 1991, once in 1992 and no fewer than three times in 1993."

"If North West Water put as much energy into resolving Pendle's floods and leaks as they put into their own share option deals we would have nothing to worry about."

“No wonder North West Water can give us back £6.50p of our own money this year in reduced bills when they are coining it as fast as this.”

131/95: For Immediate Release: 23 May 1995

NHS DENTISTRY IN CRISIS says MP

The number of people in Lancashire asking for help to find a dentist willing to treat them is soaring out of control according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says that 1,851 patients sought help in 1992/3; 2,730 in 1993/4; and 4,357 in the period from April 94 to March 95.

The MP said: “This figures underline just how difficult it now is to get a dentist. In Barnoldswick where I live there is a waiting list as long as your arm just to get registered with an NHS dentist.”

“Just as worrying is the colossal number of patients being de-registered by dentists because of the dentist’s dissatisfaction with the remuneration system.”

“The whole thing is spinning out of control. Winning the National Lottery is probably an easier than finding an NHS dentist.”

Note to Editors: Facts and figures

The NHS Executive reported earlier this month that the North west has the worse dental health in England, particularly in young children. 27 million patients are registered with a dentist (only 50% of the total population) Of these 21 million are adults and 6 million are children.

There are 18,000 dentists in England including 2,200 hospital and community health service staff who work as General Dental Practitioners. FHSAs have begun to employ more and more salaried dentists -137 since 31st July 1992; 84 in hard hit North and South Thames Regional area.

On average dentists have about 2,000 patients of which 1,300 are seen regularly. Total adult examinations in 1993-94 (last year for which figures are available) were 19.5 million, lower than in 91/92 and 500,000 fewer than in 1992/1993

The Consumers Association found that 40% of people who haven't been to the dentist in the past 18 months cited cost as the reason.

In 1979 the number of adults with no teeth was 28%, In 1991 it was 17%
In 1978 53% of the 16-24 age group had 18 or more sound teeth, by 1988, 83%. All children, and approximately 5 million adults - including those on income support, pregnant women and nursing mothers - are exempt from NHS charges.

Dentistry in crisis

The Consumers Association found that 40% of people who haven't been to the dentist in the past 18 months cited cost as the reason.

Dentists are paid for each of more than 400 procedures on a set NHS scale with non exempt patients paying an 80% contribution towards all other work with a maximum of £300 from April 1st for a course of treatments and appliances. Dentists receive

20% of their income from capitation payments: this averages £22 for each child (to cover all their routine treatment) and £5 per adult.

In the 1980s dentists earnings were in the top 3% of non-manual earners. In 1990 BDA produced evidence that a massive 43% increase in dental fees were needed to bring earning levels back to comparability with 1980. Income levels have been maintained by increasing NHS work or by treating patients privately.

Since the 7% cut in fees in July 1992 860,852 adult and children patients have been de-registered by their dentist because of their dissatisfaction with the remuneration system; these figures do not include those patients who lapse at the end of the financial year and are not then re-registered by their dentist.

DENPLAN now has 540,000 subscribers (BUPA approximately 20,000). A maintenance scheme costs the average patient £12 a month or £144 a year'and does not include any treatment for which a laboratory has to be used e.g. a crown (from £70 to £150) or a denture (approx £150)
Parliamentary Questions reveal that each adult patient completes, on average, 1.62 courses of dental treatment in a year at an annual average cost to the adult patient of £27.27

Total income from patients contributing towards NHS dental treatment totals £367 million (in 1993/94) of which £60 million is for check ups.

If patients had to pay 100% rather than 80% - and there were no other increase in scale rates or reduction in check up charge - the government would raise £75 million approximately. The UK total spend on NHS dentistry is £1.5 billion, about 20% or £300 million of which is spent on children

It is estimated by DENPLAN that the level of private dentistry is £150 million of which DENPLAN account for approximately £60 million.

24 FHSAs (out of 88) have had to resort to employing salaried dentists within the dispute period, with another 9 FHSAs recently given DoH "permission" to do so. Dissatisfaction with NHS dentistry has tripled In two years - rocketing from 8.5% in 1991 to 23.4% in 1993 according to the British Social Attitudes Report

British Social Attitudes remarks that NHS dentistry "is now close to overtaking hospital out-patient departments as the least popular part of the health service."

132/95: For Immediate Release: 24 May 1995

MP PAYS TRIBUTE TO HAROLD WILSON

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has paid tribute to the former Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who died earlier today.

Gordon Prentice said: “Harold Wilson dominated British politics for decades, taking everyone by surprise when he voluntarily resigned the premiership in 1976.”

“He was much more than the caricature - with the familiar pipe and raincoat. One of his most lasting achievements is the Open University which brought tens of thousands of people into higher education who would otherwise never have had the chance.”

“As Prime Minister in the sixties, he was at the helm of a country that was loosening up, liberalising and getting rid of the worst of the old class divisions. In his second period as PM from 1974-76 he introduced ground breaking equality legislation.”

“He made a big difference to the lives of very many people.”

133/95: For Immediate Release: 24 May 1995

MP SAYS NO TO COMPULSORY ID CARDS

Compulsory identity cards could cause more trouble than they are worth according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He was commenting at Westminster on the Government’s Green Paper published today on the pros and cons of a national identity card.

The MP said: “At this stage, the Government is floating the possibility of ID cards - either compulsory or voluntary - and is asking for comments by 30 September. It is clear there are important issues of principle to be considered as well as lots of practical problems that need ironing out.”

“Compulsory ID cards could strain relations between the police and young people and members of ethnic minority communities. Would the police have powers to demand to see someone’s ID - and what would happen if they refused? What if lots of people refused to get an ID card? What would the sanction be? Prison?”

“The Green Paper lists benefits and no-one can deny, for example, that an ID the size of a credit card would be a more convenient travel document than a British passport. It would also make many transactions very much simpler. Set against this, however, are the privacy and data protection issues which do give me cause for concern. Who would have access to all this personal data?”

“The consultation paper lists the attributes of the new “smart cards” which can hold masses of information on a computer chip. This could include a digitised photograph and signature, a machine readable fingerprint and any amount of personal financial, health and similar information. These multi-function cards could have chilling implications and applications. There would have to be absolutely secure built-in safeguards preventing one part of the state - say, the police - reading off information supplied by another such as the Benefits Agency.”

134/95: For Immediate Release: May 1995

134-140 are missing

150/95: For Immediate Release: 6 June 1995

BBC NORTHWESTMINSTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on the region’s political programme, BBC Northwestminster, this Sunday (11 June) at 12 noon.

He will be discussing a number of topical issues with Tory MP, Charles Hendry.

151/95: For Immediate Release: May 1995

PENDLE MP SLAMS MAJOR IN ANGRY EXCHANGE IN COMMONS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily with John Major in the Commons today saying the Prime Minister was responsible for “mortgage misery” for millions of people while refusing to admit it.

Former Nelson and Colne MP, Doug Hoyle, who now represents Warrington, opened the batting by asking the Prime Minister to take responsibility for the spiralling house prices of the late 80s when John Major was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, at the heart of economic policy making.

Prentice said: “I was incensed with the non reply Doug Hoyle received. He was accused of quoting the Prime Minister out of context. Everyone knows the Prime Minister let the mask slip last week when he described the situation for houseowners and borrowers as “crazy”.”

“The Prime Minister should have apologised to the nation’s homeowners for the way in which house prices and repayments spiralled out of control. Who was responsible for that state of affairs? It didn’t just happen. He gives the impression it had nothing to do with him as if he was just the office boy obeying orders.”

“The consequences of the policies of those years are still with hundreds of thousands of people. Over one million homes are worth less than the mortgage on them and over 250,000 people are in serious arrears. This catastrophic situation has everything to do with John Major and I am fed up with him blaming everyone but himself.”

152/95: For Immediate Release: 6 June 1995

NELSON’S CROWN POST OFFICE TO CLOSE: OFFICIAL

The last Crown Post Office in Pendle is to close this summer. The news of the closure announcement from the Retail Network Manager, Valerie Knowles, confirms last week’s report from the town's MP, Gordon Prentice, who dubbed the policy “disastrous”. A new post office is to open in the Victory Centre.

The MP said: “When this goes through there will no post office on a very lengthy stretch through Nelson town centre all the way to Brierfield. The Crown Post Office in Manchester Road is ideally situated and goodness knows why anyone would want to move away from such a prime site.”

“Crown Post Officers provide the full range of services to the public. We shall see how many of these survive in the new location after the dust has settled.”

153/95: For Immediate Release: 8 June 1995

GOVERNMENT MUST END HOUSING CRISIS says PENDLE MP

"The Government created the housing crisis and only they can end it" says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "Owner-occupiers, people who are renting and people who want somewhere decent to live have all been hit by the housing crisis. It's no good John Major trying to blame the victims of the Government's housing policies. The Government must accept the blame and take action to end this crisis. As people here in Pendle know only too well, the Tories stoked up the 1980s house price boom to help them win the 1987 General Election. Then they slammed on the brakes. This has led to repossessions, mortgage arrears, negative equity and widespread insecurity.

"On top of that, the Tories have broken their Election promise and cut mortgage tax relief. Recently they have pushed up interest rates and slapped a new tax on house insurance. Now they want to take away the Income Support safety net when people lose their jobs. They are making the situation worse - not better. For years they encouraged people to become owner-occupiers. Now they are kicking them in the teeth.

"For years this Government has neglected people who were homeless or overcrowded. They have pushed rents up to record high levels. They have pushed house building by councils and housing associations down to record low levels. **This year** fewer than 20,000 homes are being built for rent. That's the lowest total in all the 50 years since VE Day.

"The Government should abandon the proposal to get rid of the Income Support safety net for owner-occupiers. They should let councils invest the takings from the sale of council houses in building new homes. That would help thousands of people here in Pendle. And as I've said before, it would also help local builders and the companies who supply them".

more follows

Housing Crisis

Note to Editors: For the last fifteen years, the Conservative Government has starved councils of the resources to build and renovate homes. More recently housing associations have suffered cuts. Now the Government has turned on owner occupiers. John Major is blaming the victims of Government policy. He seems to be suffering from memory loss about who caused the house price boom in the late '80s and the subsequent slump. Now he is making matters worse. Whether people are renting, paying a mortgage or looking for somewhere decent to live, Tory policies are hitting them hard.

BRITAIN'S HOUSING CRISIS

295,000 homeowners have had their homes repossessed over the past five years
1,200,000 homeowners are trapped in negative equity

homeowners are facing average increases of £800 in their repayment costs between January 1994 and October 1995 as a result of interest rate rises, two cuts in MIRAS, the new tax on house insurance and the threatened withdrawal of the Income Support safety net

160,000 households were officially recorded as homeless last year

with councils now effectively stopped from building homes, fewer than 20,000 homes for rent are being built this year - the lowest total in any of the 50 years since VE Day

council rents have risen by three times the rate of inflation over the past five years
average housing association rents on new lettings
have increased by 85 per cent over the past five years, compared with a 27 per cent increase in the RPI

THE MORTGAGE CRISIS

Today's mortgage crisis leading to repossessions, mortgage arrears, negative equity and insecurity for families originates in the house price boom of the late '80s. The Government engineered this boom as part of its strategy to win the 1987 General Election.

The deregulation of financial services brought about by the Financial Services Act 1986 provoked competition between the banks and building societies for mortgage business. Lenders abandoned the old rule-of-thumb limits about what percentage of the value of a property they would lend and also agreed to lend people far above the traditional limit of 2.5 to 3 times annual pay.

This was exacerbated by the announcement in the 1988 Budget that tax relief on mortgages was to be reduced from the following August. This provoked further house prices rises in the period before the reduction took effect.

As a direct result of these policies, levels of mortgage lending increased both as a proportion of total house values and as a multiple of the salaries of would-be buyers. This not only pushed up house prices but when the boom ended left borrowers over-exposed.

MAJOR'S MEMORY LOSS

John Major appears to have suffered a memory loss. He recently blamed the housing crisis on "the rather crazy situation" in the housing market in the late 1980s which was the fault of buyers. He never issued a word of criticism at the time.

As Chief Secretary to the Treasury, when introducing the Finance Bill in July 1988, he boasted -

"Our macro-economic policies...have been focused on improving incentives and creating a culture that encourages risk-taking and makes investment worth while..."

After boom had turned to bust and he had become Chancellor, John Major told the House of Commons on 24 July 1990

"In retrospect we all acknowledge that it was the relaxation of monetary policy that helped cause the difficulties...The underlying problem that generated many of the difficulties that we faced was, in retrospect, a relaxation of monetary policy..."

In January 1992 John Major declared -

"We've stopped - if you recall - the repossessions just before Christmas."

Since then 176,000 further homes have been repossessed.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The Government should make a start by stopping making the situation worse. They should -

* abandon their plans - due to come into effect in October 1995 - to cut away the Income Support safety net from housebuyers who lose their jobs

* begin the phased release of capital receipts to allow councils to invest in building new homes. This will not only provide homes for people, but also provide desperately needed jobs in the construction and building supplies industries

•Figures marked refer to England and Wales only

154/95: For Immediate Release: 8 June 1995

MP HAILS SECOND LOTTERY JACKPOT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed this week's news that the area has hit the jackpot with the Lottery Sports Fund for the second time in five weeks.

Plans for a dual use sports hall at Brierfield have been given a boost with an injection of £529,750 from the Lottery towards the project's total cost of £815,000.

The MP said: "They say lightning never strikes twice in the same place but it has happened here in Pendle. It is marvellous news and full credit should go to the Borough Council and everyone involved."

"A sports hall will do wonders for Brierfield."

Note to Editors: On 4 May, it was officially confirmed that West Craven had won £700,000 towards a new sports hall at West Craven School. The breaching of a press embargo by the Liberals 24 hours before voting in the local elections caused a storm of protest.

155/95: For Immediate Release: 12 June 1995

PHOTOCALL: "Bob's Ride for Life"
in aid of the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust
9am Sat 17 June at 2 Pendlemist View, Colne

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be formally starting Bob's "Ride for Life" this Saturday at 9am at 2 Pendlemist View, Colne. The MP will be joined by Mark McCracken, chair of the Colne Friends of the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust, who are organising the event. A representative of the Muir Housing Association will present a cheque for £250 to the Colne Friends of the Trust.

Note to Editors : The Trust's area manager, Dianne Neili, adds:

"Alizon Shilton, 42, a mother of two teenage boys who lives in Colne, received a life-saving bone marrow transplant last September and has now returned to work as a teacher. Alizon subsequently helped to found the Colne & District Friends of the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust to heighten awareness of the work of the Charity in this area and encourage more people to join the bone marrow Register. One of our members, Bob Stoker of Pendlemist View, Colne (01282 868205) is blind and has

volunteered to go on a sponsored tandem ride from Colne to Halifax and back on Saturday 17 June - Bob's 'Ride for Life'.

The Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust is a national Charity founded 21 years ago solely to save the lives of people with Leukaemia and other bone marrow related diseases. The Trust manages the world's largest independent register of volunteers, with over 259,000 potential donors willing to donate some bone marrow to save the lives of patients who urgently need a transplant. £6 million a year is required to maintain the Register at its present level and to date more than 1,280 people have been given a chance of life by donors from the Register. The Trust receives no Government funding whatsoever and is totally dependent upon the public and sympathetic companies for the vital funds required to continue to recruit donors and carry out essential research and development work - it costs £50 to tissue type the blood sample of one volunteer.

The initial aim of the Colne & District Friends is to raise £2,900 to pay for testing the blood samples of the 58 people who joined the Register at Colne Health Centre on 8 March."

156/95: For Immediate Release: 12 June 1995

RAF SAYS EYE WITNESSES GAVE "CONFLICTING EVIDENCE"

Local eye witnesses who saw the eight Tornados fly over Barnoldswick and Earby in the early evening of 30 January gave conflicting evidence to the RAF Police according to Defence Minister, Lord Henley. He told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that no breach of flying regulations could be substantiated.

The RAF police were called in by Ministers to investigate claims by the local MP that the planes skimmed across the towns at rooftop height. Eye witnesses included Paul Whiteley, the editor of the Barnoldswick and Earby Town Crier, and Duncan Smith, a reporter on the Craven Herald newspaper which circulates in the area.

Prentice said: "The Minister has told me *"It is probable that the aircraft flew broadly the route planned, although they may have come a little closer to Barnoldswick and Earby than intended and may have overflown the outskirts of both towns."* When I raised the matter in a recent adjournment debate in the Commons the Defence Minister, Nicholas Soames, told me the flight path of the Tornados took the planes between Barlick and Earby. Yet the Craven Herald reporter said the planes flew over the Station Hotel in Earby - hardly the outskirts of town."

The MP added: "I am in no position to contradict the RAF police but their conclusions sit uneasily with what I have myself been told by eye witnesses. I am therefore asking the Minister to place a copy of their final report in the library of the House."

"I am totally opposed to low flying over built up areas. The risks to civilians are simply unacceptable. The Harrier that tragically crashed a few weeks ago came down close to a caravan park."

157/95: For Immediate Release: 12 June 1995

HOMEOWNERS "ON THE RACK" says PENDLE MP

Pendle's homeowners have been "put on the rack" according to the area's MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims additional mortgage protection payments will add **over £20 a month** for someone taking out a typical new mortgage after October 1.

The MP was speaking at Westminster in advance of Tuesday's (13 June) Commons debate on changes to income support for homeowners. Prentice said: "The government's proposed changes to Income Support for homeowners will mean more re-possessions and higher housing costs. Millions of people will be condemned to the continuing misery of negative equity."

"The cost of a typical mortgage has already risen by £45 a month since April '94. The government's new proposals will mean even higher mortgage costs and reduced security - a recent report from the Department of Environment found that two thirds of claims under mortgage protection policies were unsuccessful."

"The governments proposals are responsible for the continuing turmoil in the housing market. The Council of Mortgage Lenders has predicted that the government's proposals will cause re-possessions to rise by up to 24,000 a year, and house prices to fall. In fact, house prices are already starting to fall again. This means even more people are becoming trapped with negative equity - owning a house which is worth less now than when it was bought - and continued misery for the one million plus people already in this situation."

Note to Editors: The government's Income Support proposals
The government's expressed intention is to replace the welfare safety net for homeowners with private mortgage protection insurance. At present, homeowners on Income Support have half their interest payments paid for the first 16 weeks of any claim and full interest payments thereafter. The government propose that, for people who take out new mortgages after 1 October 1995, there will be no payments for the first 9 months on Income Support, with full coverage thereafter (help for existing borrowers will also only come into effect after two months of a claim). This means that anyone who is applying for a new mortgage from the summer onwards -

including people who are moving house and people re-mortgaging their existing property - are unlikely to qualify for a loan unless they take out a mortgage protection plan. However, even if people are able to secure insurance there is increasing evidence that, in reality, the small print in such policies means the protection they offer is very limited.

Mortgage protection policies don't work: DoE report
A report published by the Department of the Environment on the 18th May exposed the fact the government's alternative of a 'comprehensive insurance market in this area' will provide people with little or no real protection. The report found that: * More than 200,000 households currently run a high risk of being repossessed. * Two thirds of claims made under Mortgage Protection policies were unsuccessful. * Re-possessions are still running at the rate of over 1000 a week.

The report concluded that: *"Mortgage protection plans as currently designed and operated do not seem to offer adequate protection....there is clear evidence of the key role that the provision of mortgage interest for those on Income Support plays in preventing arrears".*

Why private unemployment insurance can't work: ABI report

A recent publication from the Association of British Insurers on 'Risk, Insurance and Welfare' explains why private insurance markets cannot provide effective comprehensive cover against unemployment, and hence the "impeccable" arguments in favour of social provision. The report outlines three major problems for any private insurance system:

1. The need to pool risk: "because the risk of unemployment is greatest among those least able to pay, the universal protection desired can only be achieved by pooling differential risk - anathema to the private insurer".

2. Adjusting for the economic cycle: "unemployment risk is.... difficult to predict and may cause workers to opt out of insurance when economic times are good".

3. Limiting the cost of unemployment insurance: stopping abuse of insurance systems requires active measures to get the unemployed back to work "which would be impractical if passed entirely to the private sector".

Savings are unlikely to exceed extra costs The Council of Mortgage Lenders estimate the total additional cost of private insurance for the million or more people who take out new mortgages every year is likely to exceed £250 million - more than the £200 million the government estimate they will save in the long term, and dwarfing the £18 million which this measure will save in the first year.

158/95: For Immediate Release: 12 June 1995

NUMBER OF LOCAL PEOPLE ON INCOME SUPPORT STILL RISING

The number of people in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale on Income Support is still rising according to figures produced by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. In 1994/95 a total of 25,074 people were on IS in this Benefit Agency district.

The Pendle MP commented: “We are regularly told the country is out of recession but the number of people in poverty is still rising. It is a dispiriting measure of how far this Government has failed to create the prosperity it keeps talking about.”

Note to Editors: Income Support is an income related benefit which provides financial help for people who are not in full time work and whose income from all sources is below a minimum set by Parliament.

Income Support Recipients: Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale District

	Quarter ending 31 May	Quarter ending 31 August	Quarter ending 30 November	Quarter ending 28 February	Annual Average
1992/3	22,654	23,760	23,336	25,162	23,728
1993/4	24,988	25,540	24,421	24,744	24,923
1994/5	24,949	25,633	24,560	25,153	25,074

159/95: For Immediate Release: 13 June 1995

MP DEMANDS SIGHT OF VALUATION REPORT ON THE CHURCHILL PAPERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is demanding sight of the valuation report on the Churchill Papers which put a £12.5 million price tag on the controversial collection.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund agreed the payout to Sir Winston Churchill, the Conservative MP and son of the wartime premier.

The Pendle MP said: "This phenomenally large sum of money was paid over by the National Heritage Memorial Fund on behalf of the nation and yet they have the brass neck to tell me the valuation report - by an antiquarian bookseller - must remain off limits to me and to the general public. It is absolutely outrageous."

"I have today tabled a Commons motion calling for the publication of the report and for a second opinion on the value of the collection. Who is to know if the Churchill papers were grossly undervalued or over-valued? We are invited to take the whole thing on trust. It is simply not on."

Note to Editors: The chairman of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Lord Rothschild, wrote to the Pendle MP on 3 June 1995 as follows:

"I am writing in reply to the written questions you addressed to the secretary of State for National Heritage. I hope you will allow me to answer all three in this letter.

"The identity of the dealer in the field of antiquarian books who provided an independent valuation on the Churchill Archive was Bernard Quaritch Limited."

"The practice of the National Heritage Memorial Fund is not to divulge either the source of independent expert advice or the nature of that advice. In the light of the public's response to the Churchill acquisition, we felt it appropriate, in this case, to release the name of the expert adviser. We do believe that the advice we commissioned is confidential to the Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund. It has not been our practice to publish professional Valuations. In this case, however, because of the public interest generated we gave details of the valuations we received to the press."

"The Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, wherever possible, within time and resources allowed, take the best possible advice before arriving at a decision. In this case we received advice on valuation from Bernard Quaritch Limited, and on the historical and heritage importance of the papers from the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, the British Library and the Bodleian Library. We also consulted the services of a copyright specialist, Martin Le Fanu and a Publishing Law Adviser, Charles Clark."

I hope this answers your questions satisfactorily. Do please let us know if we can be of any further help."

(Lord Rothschild)

160/95: For Immediate Release: 14 June 1995

MP HAILS REPORT ON CEMFUEL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed the new report of the House of Commons Environment Select Committee on the burning of the controversial fuel “Cemfuel”. He describes it as a “breath of fresh air”. The report proposes strict tests and monitoring before the fuel is given the all clear to be burned in cement kilns.

The Pendle MP has been outspoken in his objection to the burning of Cemfuel by Castle Cement in Clitheroe. The MP says there are conventional alternatives to the controversial fuel.

The MP said: “Castle Cement is in the constituency next door - in Ribble Valley - but smoke knows no boundaries and it can drift across into Pendle. Over in Clitheroe, in certain weather conditions the plume of smoke can touch the ground and this is totally unacceptable.”

“The reaction to the report by Environment Minister, Robert Atkins, is deeply disappointing but thoroughly predictable. He is already writing off the report as if it is making all sorts of hysterical claims. It is a thoughtful, well researched and balanced report that deserves careful consideration - not rubbishing from someone who ought to know better.”

Note to Editors: In February 1995, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. The consultation period ended on 29 March.

Note 2 to Editors: What follows are the recommendations of the House of Commons Environment Committee, published this week:

BURNING OF SECONDARY LIQUID FUEL IN CEMENT KILNS

1. We have received considerable amounts of written evidence on the burning of Secondary Liquid Fuel in cement kilns, and have questioned witnesses representing the cement, waste management and solvent blending industries, as well as Friends of the Earth, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution and the Department of the Environment. Having considered with great care the evidence presented to us, much of which is published with this Report, we have reached the following conclusions.

Chemfuel

2. We recommend that the Government formally classify Secondary Liquid Fuel (SLF) as waste (if necessary, by amending the law) thus applying the Duty of Care to all shipments of SLF to kilns and formally bringing the burning of SLF in kilns within the scope of the E U Hazardous Waste Incineration Directive.

3. If the burning of SLF is to continue, HMIP must enforce their own standards more effectively, and not be put off by commercial arguments such as the possible termination of contracts. For example, trials should be limited in duration and should not be allowed to continue unless the conditions of the HMIP Protocol can be complied with.

4. Were commend that the adaptation of kilns to burn SLF should be designated a "substantial change" under Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, thus requiring a new authorisation.

5. We strongly recommend that as a minimum HMIP apply additional controls to ensure that the emissions from burning coal plus SLF are no more polluting than those from burning coal alone. This would mean that:
the specification for SLF should be tightened up so that it is a cleaner fuel than coal, in terms of metals content etc, and/or
effective abatement technology should be fitted, in order to trap the emissions which currently escape during kiln upsets.

6. There is much evidence to suggest that the monitoring data collected so far is not of sufficient quality for any firm conclusions to be drawn on the environmental impact of burning SLF.We urge HMIP to ensure that future monitoring exercises take into account the full range of kiln operating conditions and that monitoring be carried out whilst fuel of the "worst " allowable specification is being burned. The number of samples taken must be sufficient to ensure that the results are statistically significant.We also recommend that "baseline" conditions be comprehensively monitored before any further trials commence.

7. We recommend that HMIP carry out a more detailed analysis of the precipitator dust from kilns which burn SLF and its potential to contaminate soils and ground water. If it is found to be an environmental hazard, it should be reclassified as Special Waste, which would bring it under a strict regulatory regime. We also recommend that HMIP take immediate action to tackle the more general pollution problems associated with kilns.

8. We urge the cement industry and HMIP to ensure that local residents are properly informed and given the opportunity to express their views on the burning of SLF.

9. We recommend that the Government carry out a thorough survey of human and animal health in the vicinity of the kilns (both those burning SLF and those burning only coal) in order to establish or disprove the alleged links between kiln pollution and health effects.

161/95: For Immediate Release: 15 June 1995

PENDLE MP BLASTS QUARRY DECISION

The decision by the Environment Secretary to allow quarrying at Swinden, near Grassington, in the Yorkshire Dales National Park until 2020 has been blasted by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP, whose constituency lies alongside Environment Minister, David Curry's Skipton and Ripon seat where the quarry lies, said the decision flew in the face of Government policy on the environment as set out in the *Common Inheritance* documents.

Prentice said: "An enormous great hole will be gouged out of the bottom of Swinden quarry and when they have finished removing the limestone it will be flooded to create a "lake" so deep, so dark and so cold it will not be able to sustain marine or aquatic life. The decision is absolutely wrong."

Note to Editors: The Minister of State for Construction and Planning, Viscount Ullswater, wrote to the Pendle MP on 12 June as follows:

“I am writing to let you know that the Secretary of State has decided not to call in the planning application by Tilcon Ltd at Swinden Quarry, Cracoe, North Yorkshire for his own decision. The Government's policy on call in is to be very selective. It is right that in almost all cases the initial decision on whether a development should proceed should be taken by the local planning authority.”

“Therefore, planning applications are in general only called-in if planning issues of much more than local importance are involved, and if those issues need to be decided by the Secretary of State rather than at local level. We have given as examples of cases where the Secretary of State might consider call in appropriate those which could have wide effects beyond their immediate locality: those which give rise to substantial regional or national controversy; those which may conflict with national policy on important matters; and those where the interests of national security or a foreign government may be involved.”

“After very careful consideration, the Secretary of State has concluded that it is right in this case to leave the decision to be taken by the planning authority.”

163/95: For Immediate Release: 14 June 1995

PENDLE JOBLESS CONTINUES TO FALL

The fall in the number of people out of work in Pendle and claiming benefit fell last month for the fifth month in a row, down to 2,213 (6%).

1,689 men (7.9%) and 524 women (3.4%) are looking for work. There are 157 vacancies at the Job Centre in Colne and 212 at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “The unemployment figures were, of course, recalculated in April on the new census of employment but the trend is downwards and that must be encouraging. The target figure for the Government to get down to is 1,708, the number of jobless people in November 1990 when John Major took over from Margaret Thatcher as premier. In every single month of his premiership unemployment in Pendle has been higher than the level he inherited from his predecessor.”

164/95: For Immediate Release: 19 June 1995

PHOTOCALL: FISHER MORE HIGH SCHOOL ANNUAL AWARDS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be speaking at Fisher More High School’s Annual Prize Giving and Awards Ceremony at 7.30pm on Thursday, 22 June 1995 at the Municipal Hall, Colne. Note venue.

Further details from the school

165/95: For Immediate Release: 19 June 1995

RISING INFLATION “INEVITABLE” says PENDLE MP

The Government’s aim to keep inflation between 1% and 4% is a pipe dream according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "In his secret briefing of Conservative back-bench MPs, the Chancellor admitted that inflation would be below 4% *"most of the time"*. It follows that it is going to rise above 4% for *some of the time!* Indeed, of the 25 City firms polled by the Treasury just two expect the government to meet their inflation target of 2.5% or below by the end of 1995.

Prentice continued: "Currently the headline rate of inflation (i.e the retail price index) is 3.4% up from 3.3% in April while the underlying rate of inflation which excludes mortgage interest payments, targeted by the government, is 2.7%. After only one year of output above that before the recession the present government has had to raise interest rates three times since September to choke off inflationary pressures. Low levels of investment in industry, infrastructure and skills mean that the UK economy is unable to deliver sustained non-inflationary growth. The Tories deliver boom then bust as growth is derailed by accelerating inflation."

"The average growth rate of the economy since 1979 has been a meagre 1.7%, the slowest 15 year period of growth since 1945. Over the period 1979-93 the U.K has had the lowest rate of growth of any G7 or EC country (18 in total)."

"It is as plain as a pike staff that higher levels of investment are needed for sustainable growth."

166/95: For Immediate Release: 19 June 1995

GOVERNMENT RULES OUT ACTION ON BROKEN EMBARGO ON SPORTS HALL

Heritage Minister, Iain Sproat MP, has ruled out any action to force the eleven distributing bodies of National Lottery funds to make their announcements well outside election periods. In a letter to local MP, Gordon Prentice, he says the Sports Council put an embargo on the West Craven sports hall announcement until close of voting in the local elections on 4 May.

The Pendle MP said: "These lottery grants are worth hundreds of thousands of pounds and it is a matter of simple commonsense they could influence voters. It seems to me prudent, if nothing else, for announcements to be made well outside election periods to prevent any one group or person claiming credit for the good fortune of all. I am disappointed the Government is content to let things rest when it would have been a very simple matter indeed to outlaw these announcements during election periods and, say, for a week after polling."

"As it is, we shall just have to hope people do the honourable thing in future and observe embargos even when the news is "brilliant" and worth sharing with other people - just before voting begins."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP wrote to the Heritage Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, on 16 May as follows: "You will recall at yesterday's Heritage Questions I raised the matter of the Liberal Democrats in Pendle breaking the press embargo on the news that £680,000 of Lottery money would be coming to the area. The breach took place twenty-four hours before the local elections. You will also see from today's Order Paper that I have tabled an EDM calling on the Government to tighten the rules.

I am enclosing a clipping from the local press, which gives a flavour of the local reaction. I know many people must feel as I do that the rules do need to be looked at again and these lottery announcements moved well outside election periods."

The Under Secretary of State, Iain Sproat MP replied on 9 June: "Thank you for your letter of 17 May to Stephen Dorrell, expressing concern that the Liberal Democratic Party broke the press embargo imposed during the

Lottery Announcements

recent local elections to announce the award of £680,000 in National Lottery grants to various organisations in the Lancashire area.

"The eleven distributing bodies for grants from the National Lottery operate independently of government. There are no special rules relating to the release of information concerning bids for Lottery money during election periods. As is the case throughout the public service, the lottery distributing bodies are expected to take particular care during election periods to ensure that their actions should neither be, nor could be construed as, other than politically impartial. I am satisfied that the Sports Council, by embargoing the announcement until after the polls closed, did take reasonable care on this occasion."

167/95: For Immediate Release: 20 June 1995

PENDLE MP DEMANDS ACTION ON FRAUD

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is demanding tough new action to stamp out fraud in the Common Agricultural Policy. He says the new CAP fraud figures are nothing short of a scandal.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "The recently released 1994 CAP fraud statistics show how badly we have been ripped off by CAP fraudsters over the years. Some of the cases now coming to light stretch as far back as 1983. Detected cases are just the tip of the iceberg. And, through the contribution the UK makes to the European Union, we are all paying for it. It's criminal!"

"Just look at some of the outrageous cases recorded in 1994. Italian companies claiming to be exporting tobacco were in fact shipping containers full of waste paper, plastic and mouldy tobacco waste. They received £2 million in subsidies. Criminal organisations were collecting butter export subsidies - and not exporting butter. Subsidies were paid out to export beef to Egypt, even though the beef had such high levels of bacteria that it was rejected by Egypt. £14 million was spent in subsidies for 'grape must' because it was going to Sweden. It was in fact going to the USA and Canada, where these subsidies do not apply."

"I want to see an end to the market support mechanisms that are inherently fraud-ridden, that build up food mountains, keep food prices high and dump cheap food onto world markets. Farm support must instead be uncoupled from production - going directly to farms which need and merit assistance, offering new incentives for environmentally sensitive farming.

Note to Editors

CAP fraud	Number of cases recorded	£ million
1993	1,284	£235
1994 first 9 months	1,597	£340

168/95: For Immediate Release: 20 June 1995

BRENT SPAR SHOULD NOT BE SUNK says PRENTICE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to force the oil giant Shell to dismantle the Brent Spar oil platform onshore rather than sink it in the Atlantic.

Shell began towing the Brent Spar to its dump site on 12 June but has been doggedly pursued by Greenpeace who are determined to thwart the planned scuttling. Last weekend Greenpeace released a leaked report by Smit Engineering which showed the cost figures Shell had made public for bringing the Brent Spar top land for dismantling were misleading. The report also showed it was feasible to bring the structure onshore without it breaking up.

The MP said: "The decision to dump the platform is all about money and profits for Shell. It is clear the company's concern about the environment is paper thin."

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads: "That this House notes that the report prepared by Smit Engineering for Shell on the feasibility of scrapping the Brent Spar Oil Platform concluded that it would be feasible to transfer the platform to land for onshore disposals, that the cost of such removal would be less that £10 million and that repairs could be done to ensure the Spar does not break up during removal; further notes that the European Environment Commissioner has reiterated her condemnation of the British Government's decision to allow Shell UK to dump the platform; and calls on the Government to urgently review its decision."

169/95: For Immediate Release: 21 June 1995

THREE DIRECTORS OF NORWEB TOOK £1.1 MILLION IN SHARE OPTIONS IN ONE WEEK SAYS PENDLE MP

The privatised electricity industry is a gravy train for top directors according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. Last year, the National Consumer Council accused the electricity supply industry of overcharging customers. This year, the 12 regional electricity companies, National Power and PowerGen have seen profits rise by an average of 15 per cent - four times the rate of inflation.

The Pendle MP said: "A handful of executives and shareholders are making a killing - in bumper salaries, bonuses and dividends - out of a captive market, decades of public investment and tens of thousands of job cuts."

"The Opposition has called for more regulation to protect customers from the cost of excessive executive pay full disclosure of executives' remuneration a remuneration committee, directly elected by shareholders the right for shareholders to vote on the remuneration of each board member executive share options are taxed as income. The amount of money these people are raking in is breathtaking."

Note to Editors:

• The electricity industry has made £14.5 **billion** in profits since privatisation - £9.2 billion in the regional electricity companies and £5.3 billion in the generating companies

• Profits this year are set to rise by an average of 15 per cent

Like every other utility, privatisation has been quickly followed by job cuts. In the privatised electricity industry, 40,000 **jobs** have been slashed since privatisation

Electricity prices
• Despite the 'RPI-X' formula for capping electricity price rises, the price of electricity rose by 2.3 per cent above the rate of inflation between April 1991 and April 1995.

• The National Consumer Council, in its report last year, said prices in the electricity industry were too high, and that customers had been overcharged by £650m - £20 per household.

Salaries have sky-rocketed: • payments to the boards of National Power, PowerGen and the National Grid were £5.3m in 1994, compared to £646,000 to the board of CEGB in 1988/89 - before privatisation • the board of National Power awarded itself a 25% pay rise (£500,000) in 1994 and its workers an average of 4.25%

The table below shows how many years it takes for 1.3m people on £2.50 an hour to earn what the highest paid directors in each privatised electricity company earns in a month:

	Annual Salary	Monthly salary	Years it takes someone on £2.50ph to earn one month's director's pay
Electricity generators			
National Power	£437,141	£36,428	7.37
PowerGen	£400,019	£33,335	6.74
National Grid	£359,000	£29,917	6.05
Regional Electricity Companies			
Eastern	£341,000	£28,417	5.75
Northern	£303,000	£25,250	5.11
Southern	£285,000	£23,750	4.81
London	£273,782	£22,815	4.62
Manweb	£259,000	£21,583	4.34
East Midlands	£250,084	£20,840	4.22
Yorkshire	£239,982	£19,998	4.05
Norweb	**£236,874**	**£19,739**	**3.99**
SouthWestern	£236,000	£19,666	3.98
Midlands	£231,802	£19,317	3.91
South Wales	£227,345	£18,945	3.83
Seeboard	£210,000	£17,500	3.54

170/95: For Immediate Release: 21 June 1995

LOW FLYING REPORT TO STAY SECRET

The report by the RAF Police into the alleged low flying incident involving eight Tornados over Barnoldswick and Earby on the early evening of 30 January is to remain confidential.

The Armed Forces Minister, Nicholas Soames, has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that he will not place a copy of the report in the library of the House of Commons as the Pendle MP had requested. The Minister says the reports are prepared for internal purposes.

Prentice commented: "When I first raised the matter in the House I was told the Tornados flew between Barnoldswick and Earby. Then it was conceded they could have flown over the outskirts of the towns. Then I was told the eye witness accounts were "conflicting" and therefore no reliance could be placed on them. Now I am told the report is unavailable to me or anyone else."

"The shroud of secrecy has descended yet again. The whole thing is a complete whitewash. We need a new culture of openness in central government with a clear presumption in favour of making information available to people. I spend an inordinate amount of my time prising information out of Ministers."

Note to Editors: Mr Prentice To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will place in the Library a copy of the final report by the RAF Police into the alleged low flying incident over Barnoldswick and Earby in January. [28814]

Mr Soames: No. Service Police reports are prepared for internal purposes and are considered confidential to the Ministry of Defence. However, the conclusions and summaries of the findings of RAF Police investigations into alleged breaches of low flying regulations are provided to those Members of Parliament or individuals who report the incidents to my Department.

In the case in question, the hon Member was provided with this information during the adjournment debate on low flying military aircraft on 28 April (Official Report, column 1159) and in the letter of 7 June from my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence.

171/95: For Immediate Release: 21 June 1995

MP VOWS TO CLOSE INHERITANCE TAX LOOPHOLES

Wealthy people are escaping inheritance tax and capital transfer tax by allowing members of the public to view the works of art they own - but by appointment only. The deals, which are legal and are approved by the Inland Revenue, have been described by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, as a gaping tax loophole which Ministers are unwilling to plug.

Prentice said: "The whole thing is an absolute scandal. Last year, 63 people were granted conditional exemption from inheritance tax or capital gains tax because they allowed members of the public to look at their works of art by appointment. But Ministers cannot tell me how many members of the public have exercised this right because no central records are kept. We also know nothing about the viewing arrangements or the venue other than that these matters are for agreement between

the owner and the visiting member of the public! I want Ministers to give me an assurance that these figures will be collected."

"This *"works of art"* scam comes hard on the heels of the other inheritance tax wheeze in which conditional exemption applies to landowners who allow members of the public access to their land. But the arrangements for publicising such access are woefully inadequate."

"I want to see fairness in taxation. The Government is conniving with the super rich in granting extremely important tax concessions as a quid pro quo for "public access" which, in most cases, I am certain is wholly fictional."

Note to Editors: Parliamentary Answers to the Pendle MP on 20 June confirm: There are over 14,000 entries in the register of conditionally exempt works of art. The register was computerised in 1993. The number of owners of chattels (works of art) granted conditional exemption from inheritance tax was 63 in 1994; 55 in 1993; 73 in 1992; 69 in 1991; 41 in 1990; 44 in 1989; 51 in 1988 and 35 in 1987.

more follows

Inheritance Tax loophole

Treasury PQ 20 June

La - Pendle

190 Mr Gordon Prentice

To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to the Answer by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of 9th June, Official Report, column 340, about works of art exempt from inheritance tax, how many chattels are available for viewing (a) at private dwelling houses, (b) at banks or other secure places or (c) at other private institutions.

SIR GEORGE YOUNG

I have been asked to reply.

Owners of works of art which are conditionally exempt from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax may satisfy the public access requirement by undertaking to arrange viewing by appointment and to lend the items on request to a public collection. Objects subject to such an undertaking are publicised by means of an entry in the computerised Register of conditionally exempt works of art. The viewing arrangements, including the venue, are for agreement between the owner and the prospective viewer, and they must be reasonable for both parties. There is no requirement that owners must allow viewing in any particular location, although in practice this may often be the place where the items are normally kept.

172/95: For Immediate Release: 26 June 1995

THERE'S SOMETHING FISHY GOING ON says PRENTICE

The Labour Party is no longer fishing about for a policy on angling says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the Party's new Charter for Anglers will hook everyone involved with the sport.

Prentice today launched the charter locally in Pendle by sending copies to all local angling groups and organisations.

"The central theme of Labour's approach is that the needs of angling and the welfare of our environment go hand in hand. This is true throughout the country, and no-one knows it better than our anglers here in Pendle."

"Angling is Britain's biggest participatory sport. Between four and five million people take part, and this is the first time ever that a political party bidding for Government has taken a comprehensive approach to the needs of the angling community."

"What anglers want is simple: clean rivers and waterways; a fair licensing system for inland waters; proper recognition from the Sports Council; access to enable them to fish; an agreed code of good conduct; and regular discussion with Government. These are all items that are at the heart of Labour's charter."

"The present Government doesn't seem even to acknowledge that angling exists as a sport. I believe it's important to many people, especially here in Pendle and I'll fight to make sure that a Labour Government takes it seriously."

173/95: For Immediate Release: 26 June 1995

MP SLAMS JOBSEEKER'S BILL

The controversial Jobseeker's Bill which stops benefit after 6 months unemployment is set to become law. The Bill returns to the Commons this week after consideration in the Lords.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "This is the meanest legislation imaginable. People without work - and already at a low ebb - are to be made to jump through more and more hoops to get any kind of benefits. Yet, at the other end of the spectrum, five Norweb directors have made one million pounds worth of profits from share options between them."

"I totally oppose the cut in non-means tested benefit to 6 months under the JSA. It will cause hardship to many people and it may force up to 55,000 partners of unemployed people to give up work in order to maintain their household's benefit entitlement. This is one of the perverse effects of the legislation. I also deplore the way in which the JSA seeks to force down wages. We need a National Minimum Wage to set a floor under wages and end exploitation through low pay. And we need to ensure all companies invest in training to stop bad employers poaching workers from those who have invested in training their workforce."

Note to Editors: The Jobseeker's Bill introduces the 'Jobseeker's Allowance' (JSA), a new benefit for unemployed people which will integrate and replace the two benefits that unemployed people currently receive, Unemployment Benefit and Income Support. The JSA will mean:

* a reduction in non-means tested benefit from 12 to 6 months - 90,000 people will now lose their entitlement to benefit after 6 months,

* reductions in contributory benefit levels for 18-25 year olds and other changes which will mean a total of 250,000 people losing out,

* unemployed people will be forced to accept any job no matter how low paying it is, adding further to the number of people on very low wages.

The real facts about the labour market under the Tories:

* Increasing insecurity throughout the workforce - over 10 million people (40% of the workforce) have experienced unemployment in the last 5 years.

* A massive problem of low pay - over a million people earn less than £2.50 an hour.

* Executive excess and share option scandals in the boardrooms - Ed Wallis, the Chief Executive of Powergen, was awarded an increase of 40% this week.

Rather than helping people to adapt to change - using training to provide security through skills - the Tories have actively encouraged these labour market trends. **Increasing job insecurity and encouraging low pay is the Tories' answer to global competition. Investment in people and business is Labour's answer.**

Growing job insecurity

The Tories' policies have undermined job security and forced millions of people into temporary or part-time work against their choice:

* According to the Labour Force Survey 734,000 people are working part time because they cannot find a full time job.

* According to the Labour Force Survey the number of temporary employees has soared by 30% (370,000 people) since Spring 1992.

* According to official Department of Employment figures the workforce in employment fell by 14,000 in the first quarter of this year.

These facts help explain why a survey by the Henley Centre found that 65% of people felt insecure at work.

The scandal of low pay

Low-paid people are paying the price for Tory policies which have deliberately forced down wages:

Over a million people earn less than £2.50 an hour.

A third of a million people earn less than £1.50 an hour.

Women have been particularly badly hit by low pay - 670,000 women earn less than £2.50 an hour.

But we are all paying that price - in the cost of topping up low pay rates through the benefits system. **Over £2.4 billion is now spent on benefits to top up the income of people in work. That means low pay costs every taxpayer £100 a year.**

174/95: For Immediate Release: 26 June 1995

PRENTICE CALLS FOR GENERAL ELECTION NOW

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for an immediate General Election.

Speaking today at Westminster following the announcement that Cabinet Minister, John Redwood, is to resign as Secretary of State for Wales, to challenge for the Tory leadership, the Pendle MP said: "We are all spectators at this incredible event, watching the Conservative Party destroy itself as desperate Tory MPs savagely turn on their own leader."

"I predict John Major will be forced out of Number 10 by a cowardly coalition of Tory MPs who are terrified of facing the voters in a General Election with him at the helm. The uppermost thought in their minds is how they can save their own skins and if they think they can do this by getting rid of their own Prime Minister they will do the deed."

"This Government is doomed. People just want to see the back of them."

175/95: For Immediate Release: 27 June 1995

PRENTICE DEMANDS A FAIR DEAL FOR THREE YEAR OLDS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily today in the House of Commons with Education Secretary, Gillian Shepherd, who was accused of neglecting three year olds whose parents want them in nursery education.

He said the former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, had given a solemn pledge almost a quarter of a century ago that all three and four year olds whose parents wished it would be able to get places in nursery education. "That promise has never been acted upon despite being taken out and dusted down and held up to public view by successive Education Ministers as the occasion demanded."

"Mrs Shepherd told me she would be making an announcement soon about vouchers for four year olds and we wait to see the details."

"What have our three year olds done to upset the Government?"

Note to Editors: In 1972, Margaret Thatcher committed the then Tory Government to universal nursery education for all 3 and 4 year olds whose parents wanted it - almost a quarter of a century later the Government are talking about places for 4 year olds only

* the latest figures show that only 52% of 3 and 4 year olds have a place in LEA nursery education which puts the United Kingdom at the bottom of the European league

* less than 3% of 3 and 4 year olds have full-time nursery places

* most of the 3 and 4 year olds with places are taught in primary-sized classes with one teacher

* as a % of total public expenditure, spending on pre-primary education is 0.4% in the UK compared with 1.1% in France

177/95: For Immediate Release: 28 June 1995

MP CONDEMNS “DOUBLE MUGGING” AS VIOLENT CRIME CONTINUES TO RISE

Gordon Prentice MP today condemned Tory Ministers for an “inadequate” response to continuing increases in violent crime.

"Incidents of violence against the person reported to Lancashire police have increased by 62% since 1979. The Government’s main response has been to cut the compensation available for victims. Their professed concern for victims is a hollow sham," said the Pendle MP.

"Government Ministers were quick to congratulate themselves on a small drop in overall recorded crime nationally, but the drop in the headline figure disguised a number of important facts:

• although the total number of crimes recorded in Lancashire went down by 5.4% in I994, recorded violent crime went up by 3.1%;

• crime recorded in Lancashire rose by 123% between 1979 and 1994 - so this year's drop would have to be sustained for 14 years to get back to the 1979 level;

• Home Office figures show that crimes experienced by people are now less likely to be reported to and recorded by the police than a few years ago.

Using various Home Office statistics, the Labour Party has calculated "victimization rates" for Lancashire:

• The risk of becoming a victim of a home burglary is now 1 in every 12 households - up from 1 in 43 in 1979.

• The risk of an individual becoming a victim of violent crime is now 1 in 117 - up from 1 in 283 in 1979.

• The risk of a car or its contents being stolen is now 1 in every 7 vehicles - up from 1 in 15 in 1979.

"These are the figures which are a reality which people have to live with in Tory Britain - and they are unacceptable. Instead of trying to cut crime, the Tories are trying to cut costs for the

Treasury. They are cutting the compensation for victims and taxing insurance. Sensible measures - to tackle the availability of weapons on our streets, for example - have been blocked because of dogma.

"We need to be active in the fight against crime, putting victims at the heart of the criminal justice system. But we also want to prevent crime and crime levels *can* be

reduced when the police, local authorities and the community work together in partnership."

178/95: Embargo: 29 June 1995

GOVERNMENT CUTS HELP TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

Gordon Prentice MP today attacked the Government for its "callous treatment of the victims of violent crime."

Speaking on the day that the Government rushed the Criminal Injuries Compensation Bill through the House of Commons, the Member of Parliament for Pendle said:

"The Government has shown that its alleged concern for victims of crime is sheer hypocrisy. The Tories have voted to cut *£700* million over 5 years from compensation to the innocent victims of violent crime. That is a 40% drop in expenditure.

"Many, many victims will suffer as result.

• Victims will not receive any compensation for loss of earnings for the first 28 weeks they are off work.

• There will be a cap on the maximum award so that those who are catastrophically injured will not receive adequate compensation to help their families to cope.

• The tariff will not be reviewed until 1999, so it will progressively lose value as a result of inflation.

"The Government is making victims pay for its failure to stem the rise in violent crime. Instead of cutting violent crime, the Government have sought to cut the help available to victims.

"This Government will never again be trusted to deal with crime effectively and it is now clear that they are prepared to ignore the interests of victims."

179/95: For Immediate Release: 28 June 1995

ANIMAL TRANSPORT DEAL “NOT GOOD ENOUGH” says PRENTICE

Last week’s summit meeting in Brussels involving Agriculture Ministers from across the European Union agreed a package of measures on farm animal transport but Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says it doesn’t go far enough.

“The good news is the licensing scheme for animal transporters which we have consistently called for. If welfare legislation is breached then the licence would be revoked. It is scandalous that hauliers who have been convicted of cruelty can resume their trade unhindered. I certainly welcome the announcement that this proposal has been adopted across Europe.”

“The bad news is huge journeys are still allowed. Much more needs to be done to cut journey times. Labour believes animals should be killed as close as possible to the farm or market. There is no good reason for farm animals to be transported huge distances before slaughter.”

Note to Editors: In vehicles which meet new minimum standards, permitted journey times are:
•Young calves, lambs, kids, foals and piglets: 19hrs including one hour rest. •Horses for meat, pigs: 24hrs •Adult sheep & cattle: 29hrs including one hour rest. Journeys can continue for a further 2 hours to enable vehicles to reach their destination.

In vehicles which do not meet the new standards, the basic journey time is eight hours. After a 24-hour stop, the journey can begin all over again.

The Government's record

The Conservatives had already weakened UK animal welfare law. Before 1 January 1993, animals were generally allowed to travel for a maximum of 12 hours before feeding, watering and resting. The Tories increased the maximum interval to 15hrs. The Tories supported even weaker European proposals last June - until it became clear that they would be defeated.

180/95: For Immediate Release: 29 June 1995

LABOUR'S NEW HEALTH POLICY: RENEWING THE NHS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the launch of Labour's new health policy "Renewing the NHS" saying:

"Labour is proposing sensible, practical measures that will ensure that the NHS is modernised rather than privatised. It proposes nothing less than a new NHS for a new century.

"The key aim of Labour's proposals is to improve patient care. Instead of the dogma and destabilisation that have characterised the way Tories run the NHS, we propose competence and common sense."

"The NHS is Labour's proudest achievement and Britain's best loved institution. Created from the ashes of war by the Labour Government in 1948, it is the most tangible evidence that we can achieve more together than we can alone."

"But a truly national health service no longer exists. The Tory "reforms" have led to bed cuts and cancelled operations, a two tier health service and record waiting lists, ever more privatisation and greater fragmentation of the service, Increased bureaucracy and low staff morale."

Our over-riding concern is that the NHS should follow a new direction - one which is patient centred and community led, a properly co-ordinated and efficient public service. The NHS still embodies the values of public service and in so doing it provides security and peace of mind for millions."

Note to Editors: The main proposals are

* Labour will offer what the Conservative's free market can never deliver - a co-ordinated approach, through a senior minister, on public health issues. Labour's long term strategy, to lift people out of poverty and to secure opportunities for work for all, will also do much to raise standards of health.

Labour's Health Plans

* The internal market is neither an efficient nor fair way of providing health care. Labour will replace the market with Comprehensive Healthcare Agreements - rolling programmes agreed between health authorities - working with GPs - and hospitals covering the full range of services to be supplied to agreed standards.

* There is no other reason for trusts owning their'own assets than as a staging post to privatisation. Trusts will be therefore be "re-nationalised." Our NHS will be a single organization, working locally and nationally, with shared objectives.

* Local health services - as trusts will become - will work within a framework provided by the health authority which will plan health care and monitor overall service delivery.

* Hospital and other services will however remain locally managed, responsible for delivering healthcare on a day to day basis, and accountable to the public as health authorities will be through a newly constituted governing body.

* GP fundholding will be replaced by a system aimed to benefit all patients not just the few. Every GP will have the freedom, presently only exercised by fundholders, to refer their patient to whichever service and for whichever treatment they believe can best provide the necessary care. Every GP will have the opportunity to have a say in commissioning care.

* Labour will review the whole of the public sector capital programme including the private finance initiative. We will not allow private sector "cherry picking" of particular contracts. Labour will also end compulsory competitive tendering and act on the recommendation of the Health Select Committee by setting up an inquiry into the influence of private practice in NHS hospitals on NHS patients.

* Labour proposed a Patient's Charter years before the Tories present hollow attempt. Most of what is presently promised is not met - from ambulance response times to cancelled operations, from immediate assessment in casualty to waiting times for hospital in-patient treatment. In government we will develop the Charter into a more meaningful set of national and local aims and improve standards for patients.

* In addition Labour will modernize the NHS by enhancing the role of Community Health Councils, guaranteeing that all staff are free to speak their mind and ensuring a national framework for pay and conditions. We will also establish a Royal Commission to report speedily on long term care.

181/95: For Immediate Release: 3 July 1995

TSB SAYS "NO!" TO COLNE

TSB, the Bank that likes to say yes, has said no to Colne. It is going ahead with the planned closure of the Colne branch, transferring accounts to the one in Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who pressed for a re-think, said he was deeply disappointed at the decision.

The MP said: “This is a real blow to the town. A hole in the wall cash machine is hardly a proper substitute for a bank offering the full range of services. I am left wondering how many people will stay with the TSB and how many will move their accounts to a bank with a presence in Colne.”

Note to Editors: John Elbourne, Retail Director of TSB, wrote to the Pendle MP on 22 June as follows:

...Whilst I fully understand your concerns regarding the closure of Colne branch, the decision whether to keep certain branches open or to merge them, is a difficult one. Long term, it is not practical to have a large branch network when the trends are very much in the opposite direction. In many cases, branches require further investment which cannot be justified.

We are aware that the closure of a local branch such as Colne can be inconvenient for our customers, but I hope you will appreciate that we have to take an overall view of the future of TSB and of the services required by the majority of our customers.

I can state that TSB is committed to providing improved facilities in it's remaining locations, and an example of this is TSB PhoneBank. This is a telephone banking service operated by personal advisers who can help by completing the majority of day to day banking transactions over the telephone. This has been found to be particularly useful for those customers who have difficulty in attending a branch. Some of our customers have raised concerns about being able to deposit monies. However, with more and more organisations now paying salaries, pensions (both state and private), Social Security benefits and other credits directly into a bank account, the general trend is moving away from remitting monies by cash and cheque.

Furthermore, since TSB joined the LINK cash machine network earlier this year our customers now have access to over 11,750 cash machines across the UK without charge. We are also actively seeking to place more of our

The Bank that likes to say NO

own cash machines in sites more convenient to customers such as supermarkets, railway stations and petrol stations.

Improved facilities are always available in the branch to which the accounts are transferred. Additionally, to minimise any inconvenience, all accounts are automatically transferred without a change of account number, or the issue of new cheque books, passbooks, or plastic cards. Furthermore, there will be no need to redirect direct debits, standing orders, pension or salary credits. Alternatively, any customer can request that their account is transferred to any other branch of their choice.

I thank you for taking the time to write, and trust you find my comments helpful. Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to write to me.”

182/95: For Immediate Release: 3 July 1995

ROADS MINISTER TO VISIT PENDLE NEXT MONTH

The Roads Minister, John Watts, is to visit Pendle on Thursday 24 August to take a first hand look at local roads issues including the trunking of the A56 and the Colne/Foulridge by pass.

The Minister pulled out of an earlier visit planned for 5 June at the eleventh hour having been summoned back to London by the Transport Secretary, Brian Mawhinney.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “I have been given a cast iron assurance this visit will go ahead - so long as the Minister is not moved to another job in any re-shuffle!”

183/95: For Immediate Release: 3 July 1995

GOVERNMENT IGNORING HOUSING CRISIS SAYS PENDLE MP

The Government is ignoring the problems faced by people buying their homes, people renting and people looking for somewhere decent to live says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP said: "The new Government White Paper on housing does little or nothing to solve the housing crisis here in Pendle. It proposes no help for families having trouble paying their mortgage. Despite 51,000 people in the North West being in negative equity and 80,000 caught up in repossession actions in the 1990s, the 60 page White Paper mentions negative equity and repossessions just once. It proposes nothing to help. It doesn't even mention that the Tories broke their election promise to keep mortgage tax relief.

"Since the Tories got in the number of homeless people here in the North West has shot up from 7,000 to 18,000. At the same time, the number of Council houses built has plummeted from over 8,500 in 1979 to just 3. No wonder there is a housing crisis. On top of that, the Government is making life harder for homeless people.

“Families here in Pendle aren't going to be fooled by a lot of Tory talk about what might happen in ten years' time. They want some action now. But they won't get it from this Government."

Note to Editors: The Government's White Paper on housing policy, published last week, does nothing for homeowners, little or nothing for tenants and makes matters worse for the homeless. It defends recent cuts in Mortgage Interest Tax Relief, confirms plans to cut the Income Support Safety Net for homeowners who lose their jobs and includes proposals to make it easier for landlords to evict tenants. Nowhere in the White Paper is there any reference to the more than one in ten homeowners still suffering the misery of negative equity directly caused by the Government induced house price boom in the late 1980s. There is no mention of the Tories breaking their election promise to retain Mortgage Interest Tax Relief.

In the face of informed opinion the White Paper proposes to weaken existing legislation which requires councils to house the homeless. It also

confirms the Tories' refusal to allow local councils to invest capital receipts in building new homes.

BAD NEWS FOR HOMEOWNERS

Over a million homes in England and Wales are worth less now than the price at which they were bought - negative equity. The number of families with mortgages one year or more in arrears rose from 5,000 in 1982 to 117,000 last year - 21 families last year for every 1 in 1982. The number of repossessions rose from 2,900 in 1979 to 49,190 last year 17 homes repossessed for every one in 1979.

Yet the White Paper mentions negative equity and repossessions just once in 60 pages. It proposes no action to help and confirms policies which are making matters worse.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief: The White Paper confirms and defends the reduction in Mortgage Interest Tax Relief for homeowners from 25 to 15 per cent. This broke the Tories' 1992 **Election promise** to retain it.

Income Support Safety Net: The White Paper also confirms and defends the withdrawal of the income support safety net for homeowners who lose their jobs. Yet the Government's own research, published last month, admitted that the safety net plays a ~key role~ in preventing mortgage arrears and eventual repossession and that two-thirds of mortgage insurance policy claims did not succeed.

Renovation grants: In 1984, over 200,000 renovation grants were awarded to help people 'do up the house'. For the last year for which figures are available - 1993 - the figure had dropped to 40,000. The White Paper now proposes to end mandatory grants and leave such help to the discretion of local authorities.

BAD NEWS FOR TENANTS

The private rented sector in England has declined over the lifetime of the Tory Government - from 2,160,000 homes in 1979 to an estimated 2,000,000 today. Yet the White Paper proposes to make life more difficult for tenants.

Rights to evict: The White Paper proposes to change the law to make it easier for landlords to evict tenants who owe as little as two months' rent.

Housing Benefit: The White Paper confirms plans to cut Housing Benefit. Where the cost of renting a home is above the general level of rents for similar local property, housing benefit will meet only half the excess amount.

The combined effect of these two measures will inevitably put more people at risk of eviction.

Conditions in rented accommodation: The Tories have abandoned plans for a national licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation. Everyone but the Government and a few Tory landlords agrees this would

improve safety in houses where even the White Paper admits “there can be greater risk of fire, and hence of injury or death.”

BAD NEWS FOR THE HOMELESS

Last year 133,000 households in England and Wales were accepted as homeless - more than double the figure since 1979. Yet the White Paper proposes to make the situation even worse.

Councils' requirement to house the homeless: At present local authorities are required to find permanent accommodation for priority categories. The White Paper proposes instead that local authorities will be required to find accommodation for families and vulnerable individuals for twelve months only, although this could be extended. This could be provided from the council's own housing stock "on a non-secure basis".

With growing demand for homes and a diminishing supply, the Government's answer is to set one group of homeless victims of its policies against another group. So councils will be required to operate allocations schemes which "balance specific housing needs against the need to support married couples who take a responsible attitude to family life."

CONTINUING CONSERVATIVE DOGMA

Privatising social housing: The White Paper proposes to downgrade even further the role of local authorities in providing social housing and to hand over council property to new landlords. It claims that rents would be held down but does not explain how or who will meet the cost.

Housing Associations: The White Paper proposes providing grants of between £8,000 and £16,000 to Housing Association tenants to buy their home and would require Housing Associations to extend a Right to Buy to all new tenants. Curiously Housing Associations would be expected to invest Right to Buy takings in new houses.

Preventing council investment: Despite this approach to Housing Association capital receipts, the White Paper confirms the Government's opposition to councils being allowed to invest their capital receipts in building new homes.

Building for rent: The White Paper has been produced at a time when Britain is facing an acute housing crisis. Last year less than 1,600 council homes were built in the whole of Britain compared with 65,000 under Labour in 1979. That means 1 built last year for every 41 under Labour in 1979. The Government claims that Housing Association building has made up for that reduction. That's not true. Last year just 42,000 new homes for rent were built by councils and Housing Associations compared with 81,000 in 1979. That means twice as many homes built under Labour than at present. This year the total number of new homes started for rent is likely to be only around 20,000 - the lowest output of new homes for rent in any year since the Second World War.

184/95: For Immediate Release: 3 July 1995

VALUATION REPORT ON CHURCHILL PAPERS TO STAY SECRET

A move by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to get the valuation report on the Churchill Papers made public has failed. The MP urged the National Heritage Memorial Fund - who acquired the papers of the wartime leader from the Winston Churchill Family Trust for over £13m - to publish the valuations. The MP says there is no overriding public interest requiring confidentiality.

The MP said: “The private papers of Sir Winston were catalogued in outline over 30 years ago by staff of the public record office but no detailed catalogue exists. One is being worked on at present but according to the Heritage Secretary it will not be completed for another five years.”

“The Chairman of NHMF, Lord Rothschild, tells me that Bernard Quaritch, the antiquarian bookseller who was paid £20,000 to value the papers, *“went through the archive meticulously”* but the valuation report was given *“professionally and in confidence”*. However, the valuation was £7m less than the earlier £20m tag put on it by Sotheby’s in 1990. I am very surprised indeed there was no second opinion of its value in 1996.”

“I am still none the wiser on the key question of how the figure of £13m was arrived at. We need much more openness and transparency especially where huge payments are involved. Millions were paid over for something lots of people believed already belonged to the nation.”

185/95: For Immediate Release: 3 July 1995

MP GETS CAUGHT UP IN PAVEMENT POLITICS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is still hopping mad over the decision to lever up the flags in the street where he lives in Barnoldswick, replacing them - to his fury - with tarmac.

The MP said: “No-one was consulted about the decision to remove the flags in April and the contractor even had the nerve to put up a sign in the street advertising the flags for sale.”

“Looking after pavements should be a borough rather than a county council responsibility. Lancashire's Chief Executive, Gordon Johnson, tells me the local council can chip in the extra cash to lay flags if that is what is wanted and I suppose this is progress of sorts.”

“The present set up is totally unacceptable and the reasons I have been given which supposedly justify the current policy cut no ice with me. There should be consultation with residents before flags are removed. Simple as that. Their disappearance fundamentally alters the character of a street.”

Note to Editors: Correspondence with Lancashire County Council attached.

186/95: For Immediate Release: 4 July 1995

PENDLE MP BACKS SELF DETERMINATION FOR KASHMIR

People from all over North East Lancashire were at Westminster today taking part in a national lobby of Parliament to highlight the plight of Kashmir. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, told constituents from Pendle and from neighbouring Hyndburn that he supported the right of the people of Kashmir to self determination.

The MP said: “Many of my constituents in Pendle have close family ties with Kashmir. They see Kashmir burning. Mosques are destroyed. Shops and homes are burnt down.

Gunfire is heard regularly at night. There are terrible atrocities, murders and rapes. No-one is safe."

"Hundreds of thousands of Indian troops are stationed in Kashmir as an army of occupation. And almost 50 years after the UN called for a just settlement there is still mayhem and bloodshed."

"There are human rights abuses which must be addressed but the over-riding issue is one of national self determination. What is needed is a UN monitored plebiscite on the future of Kashmir which will settle the matter once and for all. What people do not want are promises of elections from the Indian Government that the overwhelming majority of Kashmiris will boycott."

187/95: For Immediate Release: 5 July 1995

MP CALLS FOR CHANGES TO TAX RELIEF ON WORKS OF ART

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for sweeping changes to tax rules that allow wealthy individuals to escape inheritance tax and capital transfer tax by putting their money into "works of art". The Inland Revenue allows exemption from tax provided the public have access to these works of art.

The MP, who tabled a critical motion on the issue in the Commons today, quipped: "If you want to escape tax then buy a Picasso if you can afford one!"

He added: "The arrangements for publicising access are woefully inadequate."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP tabled the following Early Day Motion which appears in the Order Paper of the Commons today:

Public access to privately owned works of art

That this House notes that 704 individuals own works of art which have been granted conditional exemption from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax on the grounds that the objects may be viewed by members of the public; further notes that this is to be arranged by appointment only and the public may be asked for a viewing fee; regrets that the register of exempt works of art can be consulted only at four locations in the UK; notes that no central records are kept of how many people have exercised their right to view these works of art and that the viewing arrangements are for agreement between the owner and the prospective viewer; considers that individuals who receive this valuable tax relief on works of art they own should be obliged to publicise more widely access arrangements and in this connection, and as an example, would draw attention to the fact that the hon R Fermor-Hesketh of 70 Drayton Gardens, London SW10 owns a set of three Brussels Garden tapestries and a Beauvais 17th century Charte de France tapestry panel held at an unspecified location in Lancashire and that his telephone number is ex directory.

188/95: For Immediate Release: 4 July 1995

MAJOR STAYS ON AS CAPTAIN OF A SINKING SHIP says PENDLE MP

News this evening that John Major has had a *"convincing victory"* over his challenger, John Redwood, in the Conservative leadership election has been ridiculed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "The Prime Minister called this election to get a new mandate from his colleagues in the Commons and, in the event, one third of them said they didn't want him. Hardly a ringing endorsement!"

"The Conservative Party is holed below the water-line. The ship is taking in water but the captain is still there, on the bridge, telling the crew all is well. The lifeboats have now gone and there is no hope of rescue. It looks as if they will all go down with the ship."

"This afternoon, just before the result was announced, Transport Minister, Steve Norris, said the Prime Minister had to get more than 230 votes for it to be a *"convincing victory"*. John Major got 218."

Note to Editors: John Major received 218 votes; John Redwood 89; and there were 8 abstentions and 12 spoilt ballot papers. Two Tory MPs chose not to vote.

189/95: For Immediate Release: 5 July 1995

MP BLASTS FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTING

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining Greenpeace on the steps of the French Embassy in London at 12.40pm on 10 July to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the sinking of the "Rainbow Warrior" and the loss of a crew member, Fernando Pereira.

The MP said: "I am absolutely appalled that the French are to resume nuclear testing in the Pacific. The decision is indefensible."

On 13 July, Gordon Prentice will be meeting two French Polynesians who are visiting the UK to discuss the situation in the Pacific and to express their disgust at the presumption of nuclear testing. One of the Polynesians, Roland Oldham, is Secretary General of CSIDTP, one of the trades unions in the region, the other is Maire Maisson, a leading environmental activist from the area."

The MP said: "The French wouldn't detonate a nuclear device in Corsica, so why is it OK for the South Pacific?"

190/95: For Immediate Release: 6 July 1995

PENDLE MP DUBS NURSERY VOUCHERS "A CON TRICK"

The Government's decision on nursery provision, announced in the Commons this afternoon by the Education and Employment Secretary, Gillian Shepherd, has been sharply criticised by local MP, Gordon Prentice, calling the plan "a con trick".

Speaking at Westminster the Pendle MP said: "The new voucher scheme is the latest in a succession of gimmicks designed to appease the Tory Right - and one which will do nothing to improve the chances of our nation's children to get a nursery education."

“Nursery vouchers do nothing to meet the shortfall of places. There is little point in giving a parent a voucher if they have nowhere to spend it.” They may end free nursery education for the vast majority of four year olds - whilst subsidising fees for those who can already afford to pay for private nursery provision.”

“It will limit parental choice, covering less than half the value of the average pre-school place, forcing parents to opt for low quality provision.”

“It will be a bureaucratic nightmare wasting millions of pounds which could have been spent on providing new places. And it offers nothing for three year olds.”

“Nursery vouchers are a delusion - they give the impression of action by the Government with the minimum impact in terms of places. They delude people into believing they have been given a place for their four year old, only to find that there isn't a nursery place available.”

“The first priority of a Labour Education Secretary will be a dramatic extension of nursery education. We will set targets for the provision of nursery education for all three and four year olds whose parents want it.”

Nursery Vouchers

Note to editors: In the eight months since John Major promised to provide places for all four year olds whose parents want it, the Government has consistently refused give away any details about how that promise might be delivered - until now.

To quote the Education Secretary in the House of Commons only last month: "The delivery mechanisms, including vouchers, bidding systems and so on are part of the policy considerations that we are currently looking at. Nothing has been ruled in and nothing ruled out. (23.5.95)

In the press - the Education Secretary opposes vouchers

Mrs Shephard has spoken openly to the press of her doubts about a voucher scheme. In an interview with the Independent (19.10.94) she said: "I must say I am very conscious of the unwieldy nature of vouchers. You don't want the machinery to overshadow the policy". She also warned that a voucher scheme would act as a "deadweight" on the system. (Daily Telegraph, 15.3.95).

In the press - campaign of the Tory right

Frustrated by the intransigence of the Secretary of State for Education and the DfE, and the inaction of the Government, the Tory right has been waging war in the headlines.

In March, we read: "an increasingly impatient Mr Major has now ordered [Mrs Shephard] to end her objections to a voucher system" (Daily Telegraph, 15.3.95)

In April, Mrs Shephard launched a counter-offensive, telling the Times Educational Supplement that "vouchers are not the favoured option". (7.4.95)

Come the end of April however, the Right-wingers took the debate one step further, announcing that a voucher scheme would be:
"the centre-piece of a wide-ranging White Paper to be published in the Summer ... A powerful coalition of Tory Right-wingers including Michael Portillo and John

Redwood has been pressing for vouchers. Mr Major has been persuaded that vouchers will prove vote-winners". (Sunday Telegraph 30.4.95)

And in May, we read in the Daily Mail (2.5.95): "Cabinet sources say work on the proposals is now complete after strong personal pressure from John Major helped cut through a Whitehall Log-jam.... The decision marks a significant victory for the Tory Right and the Treasury over the initial reservations of Education Secretary Gillian Shephard".

191/95: For Immediate Release: 12 July 1995

SHADOW DEFENCE MINISTER TO VISIT ROLLS ROYCE

The Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, Dr David Clark MP, will be visiting Barnoldswick next Friday for a tour of the Rolls Royce plant with local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MPs will be given a guided tour of the “Front Bearing Housing” and the “Wide Chord Fan Blade” manufacturing units.

Gordon Prentice said: “David will have a chance to hear about Barnoldswick’s role in Rolls Royce although he is already pretty familiar with the company’s main products.”

“Supporting manufacturing industry is at the very top of the Opposition’s agenda. I am delighted that David is coming to Barnoldswick to see for himself the skills we have here.”

192/95: For Immediate Release: 12 July 1995

POLICING PENDLE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be meeting local police chiefs this Friday (14 July) to talk about the “Divisional Policing Plan” which sets out priorities for the year ahead.

The MP said: “It has been a challenging time for the police service which has had to cope with major organisational and structural changes. The Government is currently looking at the core and ancillary tasks of the police force and I am concerned that some of the traditional roles of the police could be hived off to other agencies or, perhaps, be lost altogether. I am thinking here about school crossing patrols and so on.”

“The Lancashire police now have their own Charter setting out response times and targets of various types and I am obviously keen to hear from the people at the sharp end how they are measuring up.”

193/95: For Immediate Release: 10 July 1995

MP ADMITS HE GOT IT WRONG

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has admitted he got the result of the Conservative leadership stakes “hopelessly wrong”. He forecast last week that John Major, would be forced to step down as Prime Minister after losing crucial support from his own Party.

The MP said: “I got it wrong. I thought Major would get around 210 votes rather than the 218 he got. But what I didn’t bank on was the Prime Minister claiming victory when a full one third of his Party voted against him.”

“The attention now swings to Tarzan, the Deputy Prime Minister. No-one is yet quite sure what Michael Heseltine is going to do with his time. We are still waiting to see the job description.”

“The re-election of John Major as leader of the Tory Party and the Cabinet reshuffle are superficial exercises that haven't made a jot of difference to the British people. And they haven't healed the wounds or resolved the divisions in the Tory Party.

Note to Editors:

The leadership race what Major says

"It is a very clear-cut decision."

But one-third of Conservative MPs did not vote for the Prime Minister

- what others say

"I don't really see that it has advanced anything." *John Wilkinson MP*

"Not as emphatic as I would have liked." - *Michael Fabricant MP*

"We must get away from the orchestrated political drivel that John Major had a triumph yesterday." - *Tony Marlow MP*

"I don't believe we can win under John Major. " - *Tony Marlow MP*

"He is weaker now than before he called this election." - *Nick Budgen MP*

MP got it wrong

The rebels - what John Major said

"For the last three years I have been opposed by a small minority."

- what others say

"He thought he was dealing with a small minority. One hundred and nine [votes for Redwood and abstentions] are not a small minority." - *Nick Budgen MP*

"First there were eight of us, now there are 89." - Sir *Teddy Taylor MP*

"It's a very difficult one for the Conservative Party. Opposition was coming from the whipless eight or nine. Now, almost one-third of the party refrain from support for the Prime Minister." - *Lord Tebbit*

No need to change policies? What Major says

"The policies we were pursuing were going in the right direction."

- What other people are still saying

"Where the issue of Europe comes up, it will still be a thorn in his flesh, unless he does change his policies." - *Theresa Gorman MP*

"We're going to come out fighting hard for a united Europe. They can't be in a position where they've been running things as they have been for the past three years." - *Sir Edward Heath MP*

"Policy issues have not been resolved." - *Lord Tebbit*

194/95: For Immediate Release: 10 July 1995

PENDLE MP SAYS BUSINESS CONFIDENCE IS AT A LOW EBB

The Treasury summer forecast presents an optimistic picture of steady growth and low inflation but few people share the Government's confidence that things are improving according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. "I have had business people here in Pendle tell me they can hardly remember a time when high street trading conditions were in such a bad way."

Speaking at Westminster in advance of Wednesday's debate on the economy, the MP said: "The Government keeps talking about the return of the *feel-good factor* and it is no wonder it is so elusive. This year saw the tax increases for a typical family since 1992 rise to over £800 a year. The Tory cabinet is already casting around for a pre-election bribe in the form of tax cuts."

"Unemployment still remains well above 2 million. We all pay the price through higher taxes to meet the cost of unemployment and social decay. Unemployment here in Pendle alone has cost over £113 million since John major became Prime Minister."

"House prices continue to fall with over one million people trapped in a position of negative equity, where the value of their house is less than their outstanding mortgage debt."

"The recovery is not investment-led and levels of investment are below those at the same stage in previous recoveries. When demand for goods increases, industry won't be able to deliver because of a shortage of productive capacity and prices will rise."

"Britain needs to invest in skills.We lag behind every one of the 21 countries in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) except Turkey in terms of the proportion of 17 and 18 year olds in full-time education. What a state of affairs."

Note to Editors: On Wednesday 12th July 1995 there will be an economic debate prompted by the publication of the Treasury Summer Forecast on the 28th June 1995. Under the Industry Act the Treasury is required to

make two public forecasts a year, one is published as part of the Budget in November and the other in the summer. There were four key points in the summer forecast which show how the outlook for the economy has worsened since the budget in November.

• LOWER GROWTH - The Treasury has revised down their forecast of the overall growth in the economy i.e Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 1995 from 3.25% in the Budget to 3% in the Summer Forecast. The average annual growth rate in the U.K over 1979-93 at 1.7% has been the slowest of the 18 countries in the EC and G7, the Treasury forecast implies that average growth in the U.K for 1988-98 will be no higher.

• HIGHER INFLATION - The forecast for underlying inflation i.e the retail price index excluding mortgage interest payments (RPIX) has been revised upwards from a peak of 2.5% at the end of 1995 in the Budget to 3% in the summer forecast. Thereafter the Treasury expect inflation to fall to 2.5% by the end of 1996 to meet the inflation target by the end of this Parliament. This optimism is not shared by the Bank of England or the City who do not expect the government to meet their target, but anticipate underlying inflation of 2.5-4%.

• HIGHER BORROWING - As a consequence of a £3 billion shortfall in expected government tax receipts for the last financial year, the forecasts for receipts are now £2.5 billion lower in 1995-96 and £5 billion lower in 1996-97 relative to the Budget. The Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) for 1994-95 was £35.3 billion, £1 billion higher than the budget forecast, while the PSBR is now forecast to be £2 billion higher at £23.5 billion for 1995-96.

• LOWER INVESTMENT - The Opposition has consistently argued that the economy requires higher levels of investment for sustainable growth, to avoid the boom and then inevitable bust as growth is derailed by accelerating inflation. In the Budget the Treasury forecast business investment to increase by 10.75% in 1995 but this forecast has now been halved to 4.75%, while government investment is forecast to fall further from -1.5% to -4.5%.

195/95: For Immediate Release: 10 July 1995

MP CONDEMNS FRENCH ACTION ON RAINBOW WARRIOR

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today accused President Chirac of a grotesque over-reaction in sending French commandos to seize forcibly the Greenpeace ship, "Rainbow Warrior" as it sailed into the exclusion zone around the atoll where France intends to detonate a nuclear device.

The MP was outside the French Embassy in London this afternoon joining with others to commemorate the sinking of the first Rainbow Warrior blown up a decade ago by the French with loss of life.

Prentice said: "There is simply no need to explode this device. President Chirac's predecessor, President Mitterand, saw no need for it and he had access to exactly the same kind of scientific and technical information the new French leader has to hand. It can be done by computer simulation."

"This action is giving the green light to nuclear proliferation. Lots of countries will be saying to themselves: *If it's OK for the French it's OK for us."*

"And what has our Government said to reassure our Commonwealth partners in the Pacific? Precisely nothing. The Prime Minister's silence speaks volumes. He probably

thinks Greenpeace is making far too much noise about a little explosion and a light coating of radioactive dust thousands of miles away."

196/95: For Immediate Release: 12 July 1995

MP BACKS "PENDLE PARTNERSHIP"

"Pendle Partnership" will be setting up shop at the House of Commons next Tuesday (18 July) when local MP, Gordon Prentice, hosts a "get to know you" event involving the local council and industrialists, Ministers and senior Opposition MPs - and a delegation of senior directors from Kawasaki Heavy Industries of Japan.

The MP said: "We need to sell Pendle to the outside world. We need to shout about what we can offer. Above all, we need to be positive and forward looking."

The MP continued: "We all want to bring business to Pendle and Kawasaki is looking at what our local aerospace companies can do for them. Dennis Mendoros - who chairs Pendle Partnership and also the consortium of Lancashire Aerospace companies - will be with us explaining in detail what the area offers."

"Pendle Partnership is the umbrella group - involving the council, local industries and others - which is making a bid for cash from the Government's "Single Regeneration Budget". This year, I want everyone to pull together so we can bring it off and get money and resources into the area."

"That's what it's all about."

197/95: For Immediate Release: 12 July 1995

GOVERNMENT WASTING BILLIONS ON WATER METERS says PENDLE MP

"The Government wants to waste £5 billion on installing water meters in every home in England and Wales" says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "They want every family to install water meters in their homes and pay for every drop they use. That's despite the fact that compulsory water meters would cost the country a fortune, wouldn't be fair on families and aren't wanted by customers or the water companies."

"It would cost £5 billion to install water meters in every home plus an extra half a billion pounds in running costs every year. I can't believe people here in Pendle think that's the best way to spend that money."

"£5 billion could pay for 50 new hospitals or over 1,500 new schools. £5 billion could replace every British Rail train and carriage that was more than ten years old with brand new equipment up to the best European standards. Just the annual running costs of water meters could pay for an extra 26,000 nurses or an extra 20,000 teachers each year.

"That's what people want to see. Not a water meter logging and charging for every drop they use."

“Water companies should be allowed to use Council Tax banding as the basis for water charges. Although Council Tax banding is imperfect at present, and needs modifying to make the system fairer, it provides the basis for a system of water charging that would be fair, reasonably simple and cheap to administer. In Scotland, water charges are already based on Council Tax bands.”

Note to Editors: The Government and the Water Regulator are trying to force people to install water meters into their homes. The Labour Party rejects the idea of customers being forced to install water meters because they would be costly, bad value for money, unfair and unpopular.

Water Meters

The move towards compulsory water metering is one of the long-term effects of the Poll Tax. When households used to pay rates and water rates few people felt the need for a new method of charging for water. The Poll Tax ended all that. With no up-to-date valuations on which to base a water rate, the search started for alternatives.

Initially the Government decided that water companies couldn't use rateable values after 31 March 2000. They recently relaxed this rule but that would mean using valuations, most of which were made as long ago as 1973. The Government still rule out the use of Council Tax bands. The Government and the water regulator, OFWAT, want to force people to install water meters.

LABOUR REJECTS COMPULSORY WATER METERING: Labour rejects compulsory water metering because •it would cost £5 billion •it isn't the best way to conserve water supplies •it would adversely affect families who are badly off it's unpopular with both the public and the water companies

THE COST OF WATER METERING: The estimated cost of making and installing a water meter is £200 each. There are 26,884,000 connections in England and the umbrella organisation for the privatised water companies, has written to the Environment Secretary John Gummer saying universal compulsory water metering is "an untenable option" because of "the cost, impracticality and effect on customers' bills".

The public clearly don't like the idea of being forced to have water meters - probably because they too are concerned about the cost, impracticality and effect on bills.

Of all the complaints which OFWAT received last year about billing, one third were about metered supplies, despite the fact that metered supplies form only 7 per cent of the total connections. This means people with meters are five times as likely to complain about their water bill as people without a meter.

As long ago as 1960, a committee was set up by Sir Keith Joseph to work out how to cut demand for water by use of charging systems. They reported that much as they would like to be able to report otherwise, other methods would have to be sought because of the cost, impracticality and possible impact on public health. That was true then. It's still true now.

Wales, of which only around 7 per cent (1,881,880) are metered at present. So to install meters for the remaining 25,000,000 unmetered connections in England and Wales would cost £5 billion.

WATER METERING NOT THE BEST WAY TO CONSERVE WATER: There are two main types of pipe in the water distribution system. Firstly, there are the water companies' main pipes for which the water companies are responsible. Secondly, there are the customers' supply pipes which run from the companies' main pipe to people's houses or flats.

Compulsory water metering would force customers to pay for all water which they use or which leaks from their part of the system. Supporters of compulsory water metering therefore say it would encourage people to repair their taps and pipes to stop leaks and keep their bills down. So they

try to defend compulsory water metering on the grounds that it conserves water. But three-quarters of all water leakages don't come from the customers' pipes at all. They come from the water companies' pipes which wouldn't be covered by metering. So water metering would actually reduce the incentive for the companies to deal with the main source of water leaks.

WATER METERING IS UNFAIR: The only reason for introducing water metering is to set the price of metered water so high that it will force people to think twice before using water. There would be no point in meters if they didn't deter users.

Neither the water companies nor OFWAT know what the financial or health implications of water metering will be. They have published research which shows that consumption is reduced when meters are installed and that some people are better off financially and some worse off. But they have no idea whether families with different incomes respond differently or who will gain or lose.

Nor have they done research to find out whether customers reduce their water consumption for the lavatory, bathroom, kitchen or hosepipe. Nor have they found out the effects lower use of water could have on public health or hygiene. Instead they have chosen to go ahead and try to introduce metering without knowing the consequences.

Common sense suggests that low income families would suffer most if metered water charges were sufficiently high to reduce water consumption. Yet many low income families need to use a lot of water, for example a family with small children or one of the million households where someone is incontinent. At a time of increasing child and pensioner poverty, we should be trying to enhance public hygiene not contemplating measures which would reduce it.

198/95: For Immediate Release: 17 July 1995.

MP BATTLES TO SAVE THE LIBRARY

Public libraries as we know them could go the way of public conveniences - into folk memory. This astonishing claim was made at Westminster today by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who claimed the Government was planning a drive to privatise or contract out public library services. The MP is launching a petition which he intends to present to the new Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley.

"The threat is very real. Our local libraries could be franchised out to commercial companies. Profit will become the motive, not service to the public. Book stocks will fall, hours and staff numbers will be cut. Mobile library services may be abandoned.

Already, our local library services are suffering because of Government cut-backs. Privatisation or contracting out would be the final nail in the coffin."

"We have already had problems in Colne over reductions in library hours as Lancashire County Council tries to make ends meet. The fact is opening hours have been cut in every library authority. In 1979, there were 116 central libraries which opened for at least 60 hours a week. Today there are only 10."

"On any number of occasions, Government ministers have been challenged to rule out privatisation. Each time they've refused to do so. Now Mrs Bottomley's in charge - fresh from contracting out half the National Health Service - I shudder to think what she has in store for us.

"Our libraries are a storehouse of information, enjoyment and education. They are much too important to hand over to commercial interests in this way. We must keep our libraries public and keep them free."

Note to Editors: The Government is planning the end of the public library service as we know it. For the Conservatives, a publicly owned and financed community service, free at the point of delivery, dedicated to ideas and information, is an offence against the free market.

MP battles to save the library

The Government want to speed the decline of public libraries by undermining their financial base and moving towards privatisation and the contracting out of services.

They have commissioned two reports, one from accountants KPMG and the other a wide review of the whole public service from consultants ASLIB (published on 16th May 1995) which both look into the feasibility of privatisation. The former Heritage Secretary, Stephen Dorrell said on 20th June, 1995 *"...my concern is...that library authorities should clarify...the service they want to achieve..., while accepting that they need not...provide that service themselves."*

IS IT LIKELY TO HAPPEN? The public library service is already being undermined by cuts in staff, cuts in opening hours and massive reductions in expenditure on books. Somerset, for example has cut its book fund for this year by 37% and will buy no new fiction this year. Lancashire had to impose a moratorium on book buying for the last quarter of the 1994/5 financial year. 73% of library authorities surveyed expected that they would have to make cuts in 1995/6.

The Library Association, which represents 26,000 library and information workers in the UK, predicts that this year is the *"first in a three year wave of cuts."* Treasury projections confirm this. These cuts are a prelude to privatisation and contracting out.

IS PRIVATISATION ALREADY HAPPENING? Yes. The privatisation that the Government are seeking is not the wholesale selling off of library buildings or services to a Dillons or a WH Smiths, but the introduction of the private sector by forcing libraries to be contracted out.

WILL SERVICES SUFFER? Thirty -four branch libraries were forced to close last year. 31 authorities cut their expenditure on books, periodicals and material last year; Liberal Democrat Kingston upon Thames by 20%, Labour Merton by 28%, Liberal Democrat Somerset by 37% and Labour Bury by 40%. Privatisation and

contracting out will speed up that decline as the new private contractors put profit before service. (There are only 13 councils nationwide controlled by the Conservatives. This includes one County - out of 39 - Buckinghamshire.)

WILL RURAL SERVICES SURVIVE? Services in rural areas, dependent upon mobile and small branch libraries, will be particularly at risk as they offer few financial returns to private contractors.

In a world where information is becoming a key resource, of both economic and social importance, public libraries have a central role in ensuring that access to information is available to all.

Privatisation and contracting out of public libraries will leave information services at the mercy of the market, preventing libraries being the one service which can close the growing gap between the information rich and the information poor.

199/95: For Immediate Release: 18 July 1995

PENDLE MP SPEEDS ALONG THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today welcomed the Labour Party's launch of its policy on the development of the information superhighway - and argued that local people, local businesses, and local schools should seize the opportunities that are going to arise as we approach a new century.

"Labour's key message is that the information revolution must reach everywhere and must benefit everyone. Here in Pendle I want to see us sharing fully in the benefits the information superhighway will bring.

"That's why a Labour Government will insist that every school, library, health centre and Citizens' Advice Bureaux is linked up to the new community networks. It's why we propose a new millenium archive to make the resources of the Science Museum, the British Library and our other great national collections available on screen in every school around the country. It's why we want to establish public information points in every community, so that we can have access to important local information. And it's why we want to open up the workings of Government, so that real democratic debate can take place on-line about Government actions and proposals.

"The Government has hardly noticed the information revolution is happening. They're hindering rather than helping it. A Labour Government will roll up its sleeves and make sure it does happen, and in a way that will benefit everyone. And I'll be making sure that the people in Pendle share in the advantages that will come."

200/95: For Immediate Release: 18 July 1995

MP CALLS FOR ACTION IN BOSNIA

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for action by the West to end the murder, rape and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. Speaking at Westminster earlier today the MP said he wanted to see a plural,

multi-ethnic, democratic Bosnia. “We need to oppose by all means necessary the attempt to create ethnic apartheid in the Balkans.”

The MP said: “I want to see a robust enforcement by Unprofor of the UN Mandate to deliver humanitarian aid and to protect the safe areas. I believe any attempt to thwart the execution of these mandates should be met with force. We should give material assistance and moral support to the Government of Bosnia to recreate a multiethnic, open, plural and democratic political community over the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina.”

“We should remember the extreme nationalist attempt to create a Greater Serbia has been guided and backed by the Government of Serbia proper which is still today supplying fuel and sophisticated weapons to General Mladic, paying his soldiers, supplying officers, and forcibly drafting potential conscripts.

“The fascist aim of an ethnically 'clean' Greater Serbia has been pursued with the utmost barbarism, including mass rapes, mass execution and the deliberate expulsion of civilian populations.

“The British Government has appeased the Serbian nationalists, has put pressure upon the Bosnian Government to capitulate and has promoted President Milosovic as a regional strong man with whom they can do business. 200,000 Serbs still live within, and support, the principle of a multi-ethnic Bosnia whereas the territories of Radovan Karadzic contain only a minority of their pre-war population.

“Fifty years after Hitler, a quarter of a million people have died in another ethnic holocaust in Europe. The international community has the means to stop it. What it lacks is the political will. We need to act, now.

201/95: For Immediate Release: 19 July 1995

MP SLAMS END TO MANDATORY RENOVATION GRANTS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hit out at Government plans to end mandatory renovation grants which are used to bring poor quality housing up to scratch. Speaking in the Commons today, the MP told Environment Minister, James Clappison, that help was needed to shore up the crumbling housing stock in the North West.

Speaking after the Commons exchange, the Pendle MP said: "In Pendle, we have 20,000 houses built before 1919 - one of the highest percentages in Lancashire (57%). 65% of all homes in Pendle are Band A for Council Tax and no fewer than 18,000 were built before the turn of the century. 14,950 houses are assessed as in need of renovation and 2,150 fail to meet the current fitness standard. It would take £14m to bring Pendle’s unfit houses up to standard.”

“Over the past ten years the number of renovation grants nationwide has fallen from 200,000 to 40,000 and now the Minister proposes to end mandatory grants altogether, leaving it to the discretion of local authorities who don’t have the money or resources to tackle the problem.”

“The Government is closing its eyes to a housing crisis that is becoming more acute by the month. What do I say to my constituents who live in decrepit housing which is falling down around their ears? What is happening is an absolute disgrace.”

Note to Editors: In 1984, over 200,000 renovation grants were awarded to help people 'do up the house'. For the last year for which figures are available - 1993 - the figure had dropped to 40,000. The Housing White Paper published last month now proposes to end mandatory grants and leave such help to the discretion of local authorities.

In 1993/4 Pendle Council gave 81 Mandatory Renovation Grants and 23 Discretionary Grants and 57 Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (Source: Pendle Housing Investment programme 1995 onwards)

more follows

Mandatory Renovation Grants

Extract from Lancashire Housing Inquiry findings (Chaired by the Bishop of Burnley and published on 1 July 1993):

• Pre-l919 terraced housing provides 38.1% of the county's private sector stock compared to 29.3% for the UK as a whole.

• In Blackburn, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale over 50% of the private sector housing stock was built before 1919.

• 9.5% of Lancashire's private housing is unfit by today's standards. A further 21.7% is fit but in need to renovation. Even assuming no further deterioration it would take at least 25 years at present investment levels to treat all these properties.

• Extrapolation of current clearance rates would produce a replacement cycle for Lancashire's housing stock of 1,000 years!

• Fewer houses are being dealt with under the House Renovation Grants system in place since 1989 although more 100% grants are given and more is spent on each grant: this has produced "spot" treatment of individual properties rather than allowing local authorities the freedom to target resources into areas of their own choosing.

• Lancashire authorities have responded positively to the need for renovation but they are all constrained by a cost ceiling of £13,000 per property under the Renewal Areas scheme.

• Changes introduced in the 1988 Housing Act have caused Housing Associations to reduce substantially their rehabilitation activities in favour of building new houses. Many associations would like to allocate a greater proportion of their resources to renovation but the current funding regime discourages this.

203/95: For Immediate Release: 19 July 1995

PENDLE JOBLESS FALLS AGAIN

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit in Pendle last month was 2,132 (5.8%) down from 2,213 in May. Male unemployment was 1,644 (7.7%) and female 488 (3.2%).

There were 153 vacancies at Colne Job Centre and 264 at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “This is encouraging news. It is the lowest jobless total in Pendle since December 1990 - although the unemployment figures have been “recalculated” downwards a number of times since then. We are within striking distance of the unemployment level John Major inherited from Margaret Thatcher in November 1990. After close to five years as Prime Minister, John Major has almost got back to the position he started from.”

Note to Editors: Nationwide the claimant count for June was 2,313,000, down 4,300 from May. The Government’s Labour Force Survey, also published today, which shows internationally comparable unemployment figures, puts unemployment at 2,432,000.

204/95: For Immediate Release: 20 July 1995

COMMONS VOTE FAILS TO RESOLVE THE “NORTH WEST WATER” QUESTION

Yesterday’s vote in the House of Commons which implements most of the recommendations from the Nolan Inquiry into sleaze, leaves key issues unresolved according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

“The two key issues the Conservatives voted down are the two that really matter. The Opposition sought to outlaw MPs’ consultancies with “multi-client” lobbyists and to force disclosure of earnings from Parliamentary consultancies.”

“After all the hullabaloo about cash for questions and cash for amendments the Conservatives still have the brass neck to vote down reforms which would bring openness and transparency into this murky area.”

“So far as I am concerned the “North West Water” question is still unresolved. Most of my constituents pay their water bills to this company which has on its payroll, Sir Malcolm Thornton, Conservative MP for Crosby. He won’t tell me what he does to justify the accolade of Parliamentary Consultant and he won’t tell me what he gets paid. The Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, says the information I’ve asked for is *“commercially confidential”*.”

“This is an issue that’s not going to go away. MPs shouldn’t be for hire” said Prentice.

205/95: For Immediate Release: 20 July 1995

LABOUR GIVES THE NORTH WEST A CHOICE

Gordon Prentice MP for Pendle, in a statement today on the launch of the Labour Party's plans for English Regional Government, said:

"Labour's consultative document *'A Choice For England'* spells out how the Conservatives not us - have already created a vast tier of regional government in England - and how this is unaccountable, unelected, wasteful, and largely unknown. No wonder even the CBI have roundly criticised the present arrangements, with its Director-General dubbing the new Government Regional Directors as Napoleonic-style 'prefects'."

"Labour is going to streamline the system, make it more accountable, democratic, and efficient. Our two phase plan works with the grain of opinion in this region."

* Under the first phase there will be *'Regional Chambers'*, drawn from existing councillors. They will have powers in respect of economic development, transport, strategic land use planning, and be the region's voice in Europe. They will also have a major role in tackling the democratic deficit in this region, scrutinising the work regional quangos, and working actively with the Integrated Regional Offices.

* Under the second phase, those regions which want them can have a directly elected assembly. But there will be safeguards, to ensure consent, and efficiency. As Labour has always agreed, there would have to be predominantly unitary local government in the region, and a clear test of consent, most likely through a regional referendum.

* Neither the Regional Chambers, nor the Assemblies, would have tax raising powers, and their creation would not involve any increase in public spending.

More follows

Regional Government for the North West

The Pendle MP continued: "Our proposals are sensible, and clearly thought out. They will create a dynamic for change, where that is wanted, but only where. And what a contrast with the Tories. They have forced change on people, without their active consent."

"The Tories botched the reorganisation of London Government in the early sixties, botched reorganisation outside London in the early seventies, and then made matters worse trying to repair their own damage by abolishing the GLC in 1986, and by the 'Banham' process which began in 1992."

"One man has been at the centre of this since the seventies - the now Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine. He was local government minister under Ted Heath, and then Environment Secretary in the early eighties, and again in the early nineties. He bears heavy responsibility for the fact that Britain today is over-centralised, bureaucratic, and inefficiently governed."

"Indeed after sixteen years of Conservative government Britain has the most centrally controlled political system in the western world. Giving power back to local communities is at the heart of Labour's agenda for national renewal."

206/95: For Immediate Release: 20 July 1995

HOMEOWNERS COSTS GO THROUGH THE ROOF

"The Government has pushed through cuts in financial help to homeowners that could add over £200 a year to a family's mortgage costs" says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: “The Tories have really got it in for homeowners. Repossessions and mortgage arrears are soaring, but the Tories aren't helping - they're making matters worse. They've cut the Income Support Safety Net which helps homeowners to meet their mortgage payments if they lose their job.”

"People owning their home here in Pendle will be forced to take out private insurance to cover themselves in case they lose their job. For an average mortgage, that could mean an extra £200 a year in insurance costs. If they can't get insurance, they could end up losing their home."

"The Government were told even by their own advisers that removing the Safety Net will lead to more repossessions, more evictions and more homelessness. But they won't listen. They've gone ahead with their cuts. Why should people here in Pendle pay the price for this latest piece of stupidity?"

Note to Editors: The Government is cutting financial help to homeowners by removing the Income Support Safety Net if they lose their job.

Mortgage lenders and the Government's own advisers have told them it is likely to lead to more repossessions, more people being made homeless and more people getting into debt. The Government claim they are making these changes to save money. But the bill to the taxpayer is likely to increase rather than decrease because there will be more repossessions and evictions. These in turn will increase the numbers of families having to be rehoused or qualifying for financial help from other parts of the social security system.

REMOVING THE INCOME SUPPORT SAFETY NET

At present, people with a mortgage who are eligible for Income Support receive help with mortgage interest payments. For the first 16 weeks of a claim, the Government pay 50% of the costs of mortgage interest payments.

Mortgage Protection for Homeowners

After 16 weeks full help is available. Help is also available for interest payments on essential home repairs and some other housing costs.

The Government plans to remove this Income Support Safety Net from 1 October l995. Under the Government's plans -

• new borrowers will receive no help at all for the first 39 weeks (nine months) of their claim

• existing borrowers will receive no help for the first 8 weeks of their claim, and only 50% for the following 18 weeks. Full rate payment becomes payable only after 27 weeks (seven months)

• instead of paying people at the actual interest rate which they are being charged on their own mortgage, the Government will in future make payments according to a notional 'standard' interest rate
payments for home repairs will only be made where the repairs are needed to keep the home fit for habitation. At present, payments are made for most repairs and improvements to maintain the fabric of a building

• people will be encouraged to make up for the cuts in Government help by taking out private insurance packages, known as mortgage protection plans

EFFECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CHANGES

The Government is pushing through these changes even though mortgage lenders, housing organisations and even their own official advisers have told them they are wrong.

The Council of Mortgage Lenders told the Government that "as a consequence of the proposed changes, mortgage arrears will rise and possessions are likely to increase"

Shelter told the Government "the proposals will weaken a vital safety net for owner-occupiers faced with unexpected unemployment or illness. The result will be an increase in repossessions and homelessness~

The Government's own advisers told them ~mortgage protection plans as currently designed and operated do not seem to offer adequate protection against arrears. It is hard to see what would be gained by expanding them in their current form"

Private insurance will cost around £7 per month for every £100 of mortgage interest payments for the first nine months. A homeowner with an average mortgage will be faced with a bill of nearly £2O a month or over £200 a year

As well as being expensive, private mortgage insurance is also unreliable. A recent survey carried out by the Department of the Environment found that two in three claims for mortgage insurance protection are actually turned down. Yet the Government wants more people to use private insurance.

Mortgage Protection for Homeowners

WHY THE CUTS WILL ACTUALLY COST MONEY

The Government say that the cuts in Income Support are necessary to save money on the social security budget, which they often say is 'soaring'. But people currently owning their own home and receiving Income Support will still need financial help if they lose their home, as is the likely outcome of the Government's policy.

If somebody loses their home through repossession either the local authority will be forced to find them accommodation or they will move to the private rented sector. So either the local authority will spend more money on housing the homeless or more people will claim housing benefit to meet the rent. It actually costs more to provide housing benefit to private tenants to help with the rent than it does to provide financial help with mortgage interest payments. So either way, the Government's changes could mean more money being paid out, not less.

The Government are being misleading when they say that mortgage interest payments are soaring. Both the number of claimants and expenditure on mortgage interest payments have been falling since 1993.

207/95: For Immediate Release: 20 July 1995

MAJOR PLEDGES TAX SWEETENER FOR PRIVILEGED FEW

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed the Prime Minister’s commitment to abolish capital gains and inheritance tax. The local MP, who has campaigned relentlessly for new rules to close tax loopholes, said:

"The Prime Minister's commitment to abolish capital gains and inheritance tax says it all. His priority is to help a handful of individuals whose wealth already puts them way above the overwhelming majority of people.

"The most well-off 2,500 people paying Capital Gains Tax and the top 2,000 estates paying inheritance tax, would take the lion's share of the benefit. The gains enjoyed by these elite few incur a huge cost to the taxpayer. Scrapping Capital Gains Tax would cost £1.65 billion a year, rising to over £3 billion by the end of the century. Getting rid of Inheritance tax would cost £1.45 billion a year.

"The scrapping of Capital Gains Tax will mean an average gain of £160,000 for just 2,500 individuals. These 2,500 individuals and trusts, who make over £250,000 each, would enjoy 55% of the benefit of getting rid of Capital Gains Tax."

"The top 2,000 estates would enjoy half the benefit from the axing of inheritance tax and stand to gain, on average, £350,000 each.

"If this goes ahead, a tiny number of taxpayers will get huge benefits and the country will lose revenue of over £4 billion. Where on earth will the Conservatives find an equivalent sum of money to balance the books? VAT on newspapers and food? Who knows?"

"The Government's priorities are all wrong."

208/95: For Immediate Release: 14 August 1995

MP CALLS FOR BOOST IN TRAINING

Government training budgets in England are being cut next year by 11% in real terms according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. But he says private training isn't making up the difference.

The MP said: "Since the Government abolished training boards and scrapped the statutory training levy, private training provision has collapsed. Astonishingly, Britain is 19th out of 22 in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) training league."

"Last year, Britain had only 216,000 apprentices; in 1979 it was 346,000 - but Germany had two million. I know from my discussions with local firms that apprenticeships are getting rarer year by year. The Government's new modern apprenticeship scheme aims for 40,000 NVQ level 3 apprentices a year compared to 600,000 a year in Germany. This means that at the present rate of growth in apprenticeship training it will take 25 years to catch up with Germany."

The MP added: "The Government's record is appalling. The Conservatives have set up and abandoned 16 training schemes in 16 years, none has lasted longer than eight years and all have cost millions in bureaucracy."

210/95: For Immediate Release: 16 August 1995

PENDLE JOBLESS CLIMBS UP AGAIN

The downward trend in Pendle's unemployment has been sharply reversed with the July total of 2,273 up 143 from June. The July rate now stands at 6.2% compared with 5.8% for the month before.

1,743 men were out of work and claiming benefit (8.2%) and 532 women (3.4%). There were 244 vacancies at the Job Centres in Nelson and 142 in Colne.

Local MP Gordon Prentice commented: "Last month I said John Major was getting the unemployment figures down to close to the level he started off with when he became Prime Minister in November 1990. I am afraid this set back shows he has quite a bit more to do. The number of people without jobs and claiming benefit then was 1,708."

"The cost of unemployment is staggering - not just to the individual concerned but to the nation. Full employment must be the central goal of economic policy."

"The best form of social security anyone can have is a job."

211/95: For Immediate Release: 14 August 1995

MP WANTS TO SEE LOW PAY SLIPS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is trawling for evidence of low pay in Pendle. He wants to hear from local people who are earning £1.50 per hour or less.

The MP said: "The Labour Party is publishing a "low pay map" of the North West as part of its push for a minimum wage and I am keen to unearth evidence of low pay in an area already disfigured by poverty pay."

"Here in the North West, 145,000 people earn less than £2.50 an hour and 35,000 earn less than £1.50 an hour. Low pay costs every taxpayer £100 a year in benefits to help those who are in work but cannot live on what they earn. With the Government's blessing, we have become the sweat shop of Europe."

Note to Editors: The Low Pay Map of the North West

	Number earning £1.50 or less	Number earning £2.50 or less
Total	35,000	145,000
Male	14,000	60,000
Female	21,000	84,000
Young people 16-24	15,000	62,000
Male	6,000	26,000
Female	9,000	36,000

Cost to Taxpayers in the North West : £265m

212/95: For Immediate Release: 15 August 1995

LOTTERY SHARE OUT "BIZARRE"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says he is astonished that lottery cash is going to the Churchills and to Eton when it could be going to areas where cash is desperately needed.

The MP said: "We have been incredibly fortunate in getting lottery money for two sports halls in West Craven and Brierfield but we are still struggling to make up the difference between the cash we have been given and the actual cost of constructing and running the centres."

"The National Lottery is supposed to raise money for good causes. That's what the Government claims. The National Lottery Charities Board says the priority is to *"improve the quality of life of those who are disadvantaged by poverty."*

"First, Tory MP, Winston Churchill got £13 million for family papers most people assumed the nation owned already. Now, incredibly, £3 million has gone to help build a sports centre for Eton. The College has already spent £10m of its own money building a new rowing lake so they are not short of cash. That £10m is not so far short of the annual budget of my own local council here in Pendle!"

"Lottery cash should go where it is most needed - and that doesn't include Eton."

Note to Editors: Grants from the National Lottery have begin to be paid out. Millions of people play the Lottery each week, partly because they wish to win the jackpot but also because it is promoted as being a money spinner for good causes. These "good causes" include Winston Churchill and Eton College. The Chancellor of the Exchequer takes 12% of all lottery proceeds in tax. This amounts to £400 million already taken out of the lottery.

213/95: For Immediate Release: 15 August 1995

IT'S MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN SAYS MP

North West Water and Yorkshire Water - the two water companies serving Pendle - are making enormous profits as water leaks away says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

"Here in Pendle, North West Water is making £540 profit every minute of the day. Every minute they are allowing 109,834,140 gallons of water to leak from their pipes. The water they are wasting could meet the needs of 5,528,077 customers." *(The comparable figures for Yorkshire Water are shown in the table below.)*

"Yet North West water is not spending enough to indentify and deal with the leaks. The company says it is investing £8.8m over five years identifying and stopping leaks but this sum is a drop in the ocean. I have been pressing them for years to fix the leakiest main in Lancashire at Foulridge which has burst five times in as many years. " *(Yorkshire Water says it is spending £11m.)*

"The amount of water that is going to waste is simply staggering. Leakage from North West Water pipes amounts to 82% of the total leakage and yet they have the brass neck to urge customers to brush their teeth in a beaker! North West Water's profits amounted to £284,000,000 last year. They should put more of that money into cutting back the water they are wasting."

Note to Editors: Statistics for North West Water and Yorkshire Water.

Company	Profits 94/5	Profits per minute	Water leaked per minute (gallons)	Daily leakage from company pipes (gallons)	No of persons whose needs could be met by water leaked
North West Water	£284m	£540	109,781	158,084,035	5,528,077
Yorkshire Water	£142m	£270	72,107	103,834,140	3,687,734

more follows

Money down the drain

Company	Daily leakage from company pipes (gallons)	leakage from company pipes as % of total leakage	Daily leakage from customer pipes (gallons)	Leakage from customer pipes as a % of total leakage	Total daily leakage (gallons)	Leakage from company pipes as a % of total daily water dis-tributed
North West Water	158 million gallons	82%	34.7 million gallons	18%	192.8 million gallons	30%
Yorkshire Water	103.8 million gallons	87%	16 million gallons	13%	119.8 million gallons	32%

214/95: For Immediate Release: 16 August 1995

INCREASED REPOSSESSIONS IN PENDLE CONFIRM DEEPENING HOUSING CRISIS

"Latest figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders have confirmed warnings that Britain's housing crisis is getting worse" says local MP, Gordon Prentice. "Here in Pendle, 84 repossession orders were made at Nelson County Court in the first six months of 1995 compared with 69 in the same period in 1994."

"This is an increase of 22% and represents mortgage misery for local people forced out of their homes. It is an absolute tragedy."

"According to latest figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the numbers of people losing their homes because of mortgage debts has risen for the first time in four years. It could mean that 50,000 homes will be repossessed this year. A generation ago, when Labour was last in power, there were fewer than 3,000 repossessions. That means for every home repossessed under the last Labour

Government in 1979 there are now 17 homes being repossessed under the Conservatives.

"The Prime Minister claimed in January 1992 that the repossessions had stopped. He was talking through his hat. Since then over 201,000 homes have been repossessed. The Government hasn't changed its policies for the better. The Government has changed them for the worst by cutting the Income Support safety net. The Council of Mortgage Lenders has said that withdrawal of then income support safety net for homeowners who lose their jobs will inevitably make the situation even worse. That is a betrayal of homeowners here in Pendle."

Note to Editors: Pendle has one of the highest rates of home ownership in the country. 86% of the housing stock is private (75% for the North West Region and 76% for England). In the private sector in Pendle, tenure breaks down as follows: 92% owner occupied (87% NW region and 84% England) and 8% rented (13% NW region and 16% England).

215/95: For Immediate Release: 17 August 1995

TORIES ON THE CHICKEN RUN

"Right across Britain, Conservatives are on the run" says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

"At the local elections, the Tories found it hard to find people to stand as Tory candidates. Some could only stand under another name."

"Now the Tories are really on the run. We call it the Chicken Run. Conservative MPs in marginal seats are chickening out and trying for safer seats elsewhere. Members of the Cabinet are leading the way. First and foremost is Tory Party Chair, Brian Mawhinney. He's decided that his seat in Peterborough will swing to Labour so he's moving to the seat next door."

"Other Cabinet members on the chicken run include Stephen Dorrell, Peter Lilley and Sir George Young. They are all terrified to stand in the seats they currently represent."

“Labour has established Operation Chicken Watch to count the Tory Chickens as they hatch.”

Note to Editors: So far, Labour has identified the following Tory Chickens

Tory Chicken	Current seat	Chicken run to...
Brian Mawhinney	Peterborough	Quitting Peterborough. Looking for a safer seat
Stephen Dorrell	Loughborough	Selected for neighbouring Charnwood seat
Nicholas Soames	Crawley	Selected for Mid Sussex
Peter Lilley	St Albans	Speculation over move to new seat of Hitchen & Harpenden

John Carlisle	Luton North	Speculation over move to Mid Beds
David Amess	Basildon	Selected for Southend West
Peter Bottomley	Eltham	Announced he's quitting Eltham. Looking for safer seat
Sir John Wheeler	Westminster	Speculation over move to Chelsea
Sebastian Coe	Falmouth and Cambourne	Rumoured to be quitting Falmouth and Cambourne and looking for safer seat
Dudley Fishburn	Kensington	Announced he's not fighting next Election
Terry Dicks	Hayes and Harlington	Looking for move to St Ives
Sir George Young	Ealing Acton	Seat becomes marginal after boundary review. Rumoured to be interested in Maidenhead

TORY CHICKENS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT Tory MPs are merely following the example of countless Tory candidates for the local elections in May who were too chicken to run as official Tories. They invented a wide variety of ways to describe themselves rather than admit to being a Tory. As one Tory candidate said "If I put 5ft 10in, fat and ugly after my name it would win me more votes than Conservative". Examples included -

In Kings Lynn, Tory candidates took to describing themselves as 'Horiculturalist' or 'Retired Newsagent'.

In Suffolk Coastal - John Gummer's local council both the Tory Mayor and the Chairman of the local Conservative Association stood as 'Independents'

In Bridgnorth, seven Tory councillors stood as 'Independent' or 'Independent Conservative'.

In Mid Bedfordshire, one Tory councillor described himself as 'Independent'. Another gave no description at all.

In Mid Worcestershire nine active local Tories failed to describe themselves as Tory on the ballot.

Despite this attempted chicken run in the local elections, the Tories

suffered the worst night in local electoral history, losing over 2,000 seats.

217/95: For Immediate Release: 22 August 1995

MP TO ADDRESS DISABILITY ISSUES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be speaking this Thursday (24 August) to the Disability Consultation Forum hosted by Pendle Council.

He will be talking about the latest disability legislation and what it will mean for local people. Last January, the MP dubbed the Government's new Disability Bill as “hopelessly inadequate”.

The MP said: “Until last year the Government even refused to acknowledge that discrimination against disabled people existed. They have certainly moved some way since but the proposals still fall woefully short of the comprehensive and enforceable civil rights disabled people so desperately need and deserve.”

Note to Editors:
The Bill - which comes back to the Commons from the Lords in October - sets up a National Disability Council. But without a Commission disabled people will be left high and dry. Individuals will be left fighting the legal system alone and without the support of legal aid. The Government have only offered a monitoring agency and an unaccountable talking shop. What disabled people need is a properly funded, effective and powerful enforcement agency which can investigate discrimination, take up cases and enforce the law.

Definition of Disability. The Government's definition is inadequate confused and confusing. Reinforcing negative attitudes and public perceptions, the definition excludes many of the people who experience disability discrimination most strongly.

Employment. The Government proposes the abolition of the Quota. This will actually take away existing rights from disabled people before we have seen the effect of any new proposals. And the Government's new employment rights will only apply to firms employing 20 or more people. 96.4% of businesses currently employ less than 20 people; small businesses are the fastest growing sector of the economy.

Access to Goods & Services. Whilst claiming to seek the abolition of discrimination in the provision of goods and services the Government's own examples of, "alternative means" of provision merely illustrate the extent to which they have failed to comprehend the very nature of discrimination faced by disabled people.

Disability

The definition of disability in the Government's Bill has been called "Inadequate, Confused and Confusing" (MIND)

The Bill's definition of disability reinforces negative attitudes, whilst excluding many of the people who experience disability discrimination most strongly. In order to qualify for protection under the new law an individual has to show that he or she has a major restriction on their life stemming from an impairment.

The Government proposes a person is disabled if he or she

".. has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to day activities."

Whilst this is an adequate starting point, the (Private Members) Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill extends beyond this to take into account the stigma attached to individuals which can be responsible for restricting people's lives, and can do so in the absence of any actual disability by including those with a "history or reputation" of disability. This is the definition that has been successfully employed by legislation in Australia, America and New Zealand.

The Government's Bill excludes many people who face disability discrimination. They have, therefore, had to include a highly convoluted and ambiguous schedule to explain additional cases who will be deemed to be disabled.

Nevertheless many people suffering from discrimination will still be excluded from all the legislation. For example, people with histories of mental health problems will only be able to claim legal protection against the discrimination which they so frequently face if they can show that they have not recovered from their breakdown.

218/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August 1995

MP RIDICULES "SIGNING ON" RULES

Out of work Barlickers are being short changed by the Employment Service claims the town's MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP says unemployed people who used to sign on in Barnoldswick before they closed the Job Centre now have to go more than five miles away to Colne. The cost of the bus fares comes to over £50 a year - more than a week's unemployment benefit.

The MP said: "It seems quite wrong that travelling costs are not taken into account. The Chief Executive of the Employment Service, Mike Fogden, tells me that while jobless people have, quite rightly, to sign on in person there is a special concession which allows people who live more than six miles from their nearest Employment Service office to sign on by post. The old Job Centre in Barlick is 5.1 miles from the one in Colne by the most direct road route."

"I have now written to the Employment Secretary, Gillian Shepherd, to press her to reimburse the legitimate travelling costs of people who live beyond walking distance from their nearest Job Centre. Who decided on the six mile limit anyway? And why six miles and not five or four or three?."

"It is a crazy system."

219/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August 1995

MP WELCOMES NEW INSIDER DEALING INVESTIGATION OF LORD ARCHER

News that the controversial millionaire author and former Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party, Lord Archer, may be investigated again by DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) inspectors over Anglia TV share dealing has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Weekend press reports (Sunday Times, 20 August) say the former President of the Board of Trade and now Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, ordered a fresh inquiry in May of this year. The paper says the new inquiry will examine share dealings by other associates of Lord Archer including Karen Morgan Thomas who made a profit of £22,000 on Anglia shares in just 17 days. The paper goes on to say that Morgan Thomas met Archer through his fundraising work for the Conservative Party and that she was not interviewed in the original inquiry."

Speaking today in his Pendle constituency, the MP said: "This is good news. I have always believed there was more to come out of this whole affair."

"The rules on insider trading need to be tightened up. It is an absolute disgrace that people can make thousands of pounds overnight by using privileged information."

Note to Editors: Last March, Lord Archer broke six months of silence in a five line letter to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP had been relentlessly pressing the peer to come clean and answer a series of unanswered questions. The Pendle MP tabled the following motion in The House of Commons:

CONDUCT OF LORD ARCHER IN RESPECT OF SHARE DEALING

“That this House notes that after an inordinate delay of six months Lord Archer has finally replied to the hon Member for Pendle about the peer’s share dealing in Anglia Television in January 1994; further notes the noble Lord’s comment that DTI lawyers said there was no case to answer and that the Secretary of State decided to ask the advice of independent lawyers who came to exactly the same conclusion; recalls that neither the DTI

more follows

Inspectors’ report nor the instructions to or advice from the independent lawyers have ever been published; believes that a string of questions remain unanswered and again invites the noble Lord to lay the matter to rest once and for all by simply explaining why he bought shares on behalf of Mr Broosk Saib, why he was confident the share price would rise, why he asked for the transaction to be done on new account dealing terms, whether the shares were to be held as a long-term investment and, if so, whether the noble Lord or Mr Saib would pay the £240,000 for the shares on settlement day.”

220/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August 1995

RESERVOIRS SOLD OFF AS "SURPLUS"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is hopping mad over weekend reports that the local privatised water companies, Yorkshire Water and North West Water, have been selling off reservoirs because they are allegedly "surplus to requirements".

The MP said: "I am absolutely astonished. According to the Sunday Times, over the last four years, Yorkshire Water has disposed of no fewer than 20 reservoirs and towers used to store water. This number includes one in Bradford where stand-pipes have now appeared. The company has apparently applied for planning permission to built houses on it!"

"The same report says North West Water had sold four reservoirs over the past four years on the grounds they were old and cost too much to maintain."

"I have today written to Sir Desmond Pitcher, Chairman of North West Water, and his counterpart over at Yorkshire Water, Sir Gordon Jones, asking for chapter and verse. Many people must feel, as I do, that precious assets such as reservoirs are being flogged off to top up the coffers of the privatised water companies that are already overflowing with cash."

In his letter to the water chiefs the Pendle MP says: "These reservoirs were sold presumably because someone, somewhere, believed there was sufficient capacity elsewhere in the system to cope with demand. Recent events have proved that to be wholly incorrect."

221/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August 1995

MP BLASTS NOISY NEIGHBOURS!

The heatwave has triggered a tide of complaints to local MP, Gordon Prentice, about inconsiderate people ghetto-blasting their neighbours with ear splitting music at all hours of the day and night.

The MP says the problem is more acute now, in high summer, when windows are open and people are using the pavement almost as an extension of their home. "People are getting very hot under the collar with this explosive combination of heat and noise."

"I had a group of people to see me at the weekend saying they were being driven to distraction by a noisy neighbour. Incredibly, she had moved her loud speakers from inside her house onto the pavement outside. She had turned up the volume, forcing the entire neighbourhood to listen to her choice of music. There was no escape from this hell."

"I have pressed the local council before now to set up a "party patrol" to bring these anti-social neighbours to book. Clearly, a word in the ear of these noisy people is not enough. They are deaf to reason. I shall be pressing for tough new powers to confiscate the radios, stereos, and ghetto blasters of these ignorant people who think nothing of making a misery of their neighbours' lives."

222/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August 1995

MINISTER DRIVES INTO PENDLE

Roads Minister, John Watts, is to visit Pendle this Thursday 24 August to take a first hand look at local roads issues including the trunking of the A56 and the Colne/Foulridge by pass.

The Minister pulled out of an earlier visit planned for 5 June at the eleventh hour having been summoned back to London by the then Transport Secretary, Brian Mawhinney.

The Pendle MP said: "The Planning Guidance from the Government Office for the North West makes it clear there is nothing in the trunk road programme for the

Colne-Foulridge by-pass. The Government has already ruled out any eastwards extension of the M65. That is our starting point."

"However, the reality is that when the M65-M6 link is complete, Colne is likely to be engulfed in traffic and we have got to ask ourselves where is it going to go. At the moment it is going to be dumped straight into the town."

"The future of the old railway line between Colne and Skipton is another issue that has come to be enmeshed with the roads proposal. There are a number of places where the trace of the old railway line is already broken and proposals in the pipeline will make it ever more difficult to re-open the line as a number of people would like to see happen. The **Earby Go!** rural challenge bid proposal for a new access road from the A56 to Wardle Storeys would cut right across the line of the old railway."

"The proposed single carriageway by-pass from Colne to Foulridge would follow the line of the disused railway. If the Minister is persuaded, and if the by-pass does get the go-ahead, a lot of work will have to be done to minimise its impact on that beautiful valley. I am not someone who believes in new roads for the sake of them. The fact is, sometimes they are needed."

223/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August 1995

FT CONFIRMS GAPING LOOPHOLE IN INHERITANCE TAX

The Financial Times has confirmed the existence of a gaping loophole in Inheritance Tax highlighted over recent months by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, who has campaigned relentlessly for new rules to close tax loopholes, says the public is being taken for a ride.

The MP, has repeatedly called for sweeping changes to the tax rules that allow wealthy individuals to escape inheritance tax and capital transfer tax by putting their money into “works of art”. The Inland Revenue allows exemption from tax provided the public have access to these works of art.

The MP said: "Public access to these privately owned works of art is almost entirely fictional and now I see this confirmed by the Financial Times. (20 August) Its readers are being advised to tell the Revenue the works of art they own are available for public viewing."

The FT quotes James Jowitt of Sotheby's who says "*The test is not tough and 95% of all applications are granted."* The FT then goes on to advise its readers that the objects must be kept in the UK and be available for public view although Jowitt says once an object is on the list of exempt works of art *"you rarely hear anything more about it."*

"This simply confirms what I have been saying for ages. This whole business is a scam."

The Pendle MP has criticised the Prime Minister’s commitment to abolish capital gains and inheritance tax which, he says, would cost the Exchequer £1.45 billion every year.

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP tabled the following Early Day Motion which appeared on the Order Paper of the Commons last month:

more follows

MP urges closure of Tax Loopholes

Public access to privately owned works of art

That this House notes that 704 individuals own works of art which have been granted conditional exemption from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax on the grounds that the objects may be viewed by members of the public; further notes that this is to be arranged by appointment only and the public may be asked for a viewing fee; regrets that the register of exempt works of art can be consulted only at four locations in the UK; notes that no central records are kept of how many people have exercised their right to view these works of art and that the viewing arrangements are for agreement between the owner and the prospective viewer; considers that individuals who receive this valuable tax relief on works of art they own should be obliged to publicise more widely access arrangements and in this connection, and as an example, would draw attention to the fact that the hon R Fermor-Hesketh of 70 Drayton Gardens, London SW10 owns a set of three Brussels Garden tapestries and a Beauvais 17th century Charte de France tapestry panel held at an unspecified location in Lancashire and that his telephone number is ex directory.

224/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August 1995

MP SLAMS "NOISY' CONCRETE M-WAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is furious at news that the new M65-M6 link up is to be surfaced with concrete rather than tarmac. he claims concrete is noticeably noisier and it is being used as a cost cutting measure.

The MP said: "This sort of thing makes my blood boil. The **Lancashire Evening Telegraph** on 18 August quotes the Department of Transport saying the concrete surface was submitted by the original contractor which was approved by the Department *"and was considered sufficient".* The Department then goes on to say *"noise pollution is not calculated by road surface but is increased by the volume of traffic using the road."*

"What a lot of drivel! For any given number of vehicles using a motorway, the noise from a concrete surface is measurably greater than from tarmac or from the latest development, porous asphalt. This is being done simply to save cash and damn the consequences for the people living nearby."

"I have spent months on the Select Committee on the Channel Rail Link Bill which is also looking at motorway widening in Kent so I know what I am talking about. Concrete motorways went out with the stone age. Noise pollution matters just as much here in the North West as in the South East."

"I have written to the Roads Minister, John Watts about this appalling decision, pressing him to reconsider. He is visiting Pendle this Thursday and I will have an excellent opportunity to button hole him then."

225/95: For Immediate Release: 21 August1995

PENDLE MP SAYS NO TO PROPOSED COUNCIL SHAKE UP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has told the Local Government Commission - the body charged by Parliament to propose changes to the local government map of England - that Lancashire should now be left alone.

The Government wants to create free standing or "unitary" authorities in Blackburn and Blackpool while leaving the rest of the County two-tier. In his letter to the Martin Easteal, the Commission's Chief Executive, the MP says:

"I am writing to you to express my deep reservations about the proposal to give Blackburn and Blackpool unitary status, leaving the two tier system operating in the remaining 12 District Councils within the County."

"You will know from my previous correspondence, that I have long supported unitary local government, but as part of a considered and coherent structural reform of the entire County. Extracting a couple of councils while leaving the vast majority unchanged would, I believe, do enormous damage to the integrity of the local government system in Lancashire." .

"I cannot believe for one moment that there will be savings. On the contrary, if the proposal does become a reality, it will mean additional costs for council tax payers throughout Lancashire. And there seems to be no good reason why these two local authorities should be plucked from the fourteen districts as having some special merit which warrants unitary status. What about Preston, or Lancaster? Or, indeed, the authority next door to mine, Burnley? My own view is that the status quo should apply in Lancashire."

226/95: For Immediate Release: 23 August 1995

NEW BID FOR NW TV IN WEST CRAVEN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is making a fresh bid to get Granada Television and BBC North West beamed into West Craven. He is asking the local council if it would be prepared to help pay for the transmitter needed to bring local TV news into the homes of local people.

The MP said: "I have been trying to get some action on this issue for ages and now it looks as if we might be getting somewhere. I got the technical people from Granada to come to West Craven to check out the TV reception problem and things are now moving."

"Most people living in Barnoldswick and Earby and the surrounding villages get their TV from Leeds bringing news from as far away as Humberside and Lincolnshire. Where I live in Barnoldswick we never seem to get any local news on our TV screens. So far as Yorkshire Television is concerned we are not in their area - although we receive their signals - so they never cover events here. We could just as well be on the far side of the moon."

"I have now heard from Granada Television's technical people and they tell me the transmission problems in West Craven could be solved for about £45,000 maximum - or, possibly, as little as £10,000. These are not large sums of money given the number of people affected. To put it in context, Pendle Council is already spending over

£30,000 to police the cable TV company, Nynex, which is currently digging up pavements in Brierfield."

"The technical survey would cost about £5,000 and the typical cost of a relay transmitter is £40,000. Another option is an "active reflector" which costs about £5,000 although the technical people say this is the less effective option."

"I am writing formally to Pendle Council asking for its backing. And I shall also be getting in touch with the local parish and town councils seeking their support."

more follows

TV in West Craven

Note to Editors: Correspondence from the ITV Network Technology Centre to Granada Television tackled the technical issues in this way:

Barnoldswick and Earby are in a valley and screened from Winter Hill and Pendle Forest by very high land to the west. A few houses at the southern end of Earby are able to receive a weak signal from Winter Hill. The area is however well served by Skipton, which is a high power (10kW) relay of Emley Moor. Most houses have low gain group B aerials directed at Skipton.

If these towns are to be provided with a Granada signal, the best source would be Winter Hill (channel 59) and there appear to be three alternative ways of providing it. As you might expect, each has its disadvantages.

1. A fifth channel from Skipton relay. This would be an expensive option, and a spare channel may not be available at the high power required from this site.

2. An active deflector on channel 59 at the BT link site on Thornton Moor (SD937462). This location receives very high signal levels from Winter Hill and looks directly down on the two towns. It is unlikely that a deflector here would cause any interference to other viewers of Winter Hill, except the few existing viewers in Earby who would have to turn their aerials to Thornton Moor. This would be a very simple and cheap installation on the existing BT mast, but viewers in Barnoldswick and Earby would need additional aerials to receive it.

3. A low power relay within the valley. There is a cellular radio mast to the north of Earby (SD898480) which is approximately in line with the viewers existing aerials. A brief check carried out at ground level on this site suggests that an adequate input signal may be available from Winter Hill, but an accurate measurement at mast height would be necessary to prove the point. A possible complication is that although existing receive signals could be used, perhaps with some re-alignment in certain cases, signal levels from the new relay will be much lower than those from the high power Skipton relay. However, this appears at first glance to be the best option.

Note 2 to Editors: The above options would need a detailed technical survey.

227/95: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1995

MP WARNS OVER RAIL SAFETY

"Rail privatisation is a threat to safety for passengers and staff" says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims "safety is not safe" with Railtrack.

The Pendle MP is no stranger to railway safety issues. In 1993 he wrong footed the Prime Minister with revelations about the "Puffing Billy" forced to run at 20mph between Rose Grove station and Colne because of the state of the track. Following the publicity, the track was repaired.

The MP said: "Recent reports leaked from Railtrack show that the company isn't clear whether they or the contractors they employ are in charge of safety or, indeed, whether the staff involved are competent to deal with safety."

"The reports show Railtrack's major projects division hasn't any means of assessing safety risks and it will be 18 months before they can effectively manage safety. All this from a company due to be sold off in six months time."

"The Opposition has always said that privatisation would put safety at risk - now even Railtrack can't deny it. For the sake of rail passengers and staff here in Pendle as elsewhere the Government should drop rail privatisation now."

"No-one wants it. It is a disaster waiting to happen."

Note to Editors: Railtrack is responsible for managing British Rail track and signalling. It will be hived off and privatised in April 1996. The break up of the railway into a large number of operating un its is bound to raise extra problems about responsibility for safety. New material leaked from Railtrack raises a number of specific issues.

Railtrack Major Projects Division Report. This report from a safety Assessment manager makes it clear that: It will be at least 18 months before Railtrack will effectively manage safety; the Major Products Division has no means of assessing safety risks; Railtrack has no proper safety assessment procedures for its section management; safety procedures are so lax "another Clapham" has twice only been narrowly averted

Rail Safety

Management Report on the incident at Hitchin. This report says Railtrack needs to review its safety policies including whether Railtrack or its contractors are in charge of safety; who is liable if an accident occurs; the safety competence of Railtrack and contractors' staff; safety training and documentation.

228/95: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1995

ROADS MINISTER OFFERS TEA AND SYMPATHY SAYS PRENTICE

Last week's visit to Pendle by Roads Minister, John Watts, offered little more than tea and sympathy according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

“The Minister came, saw and scarpered. He confirmed that nothing is likely to happen until the M65-M6 link up is completed when the Government will be able to monitor the actual number of vehicles spilling off the end of the M65 at Colne. As far as I am concerned this is far too late. It is possible to estimate the volume of additional traffic and make decisions on that basis. Indeed, the Government has already made projections in answers to questions I have raised in Parliament.”

“The draft Regional Guidance issued by the Government’s North West Office in April also confirms the policy of “wait and see” what happens.”

“I also tackled the Minister about the appalling decision to surface the M65-M6 link with concrete rather than tarmac which cuts down on noise pollution. Concrete reflects noise as anyone who has driven over it will tell you.”

The Minister told me they were laying something new - “whisper concrete”. I want to know how much it costs compared with traditional tarmac. What you might call “hush money!” I am also digging out details of its noise absorbent qualities compared with the alternatives.”

“The North West mustn’t be saddled with cut price options which wouldn’t see the light of day in the South East.”

229/95: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1995

"ARE YOU RECEIVING ME?" asks MP

Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting (DTB) is about to hit Britain says local MP, Gordon Prentice. This new technology allows up to twenty channels to be broadcast from land based transmitters rather than the four at present - BBC 1 and 2; ITV and Channel 4.

The MP said: “The Government has just published a White Paper on DTB and we can expect new legislation in the Autumn to clear the way for the introduction of the new technology. The high tech revolution is now gathering pace. By 1998 we could have a multiplicity of TV channels to choose from with interactive television opening the way to home shopping, home banking and so on. We shall be able to talk to the screen in the corner and it will be able to talk back. Digital television also opens the way to wide screen, high definition TV.”

“These additional channels - coupled with sky and cable television - raise serious issues about control and access to them. Millions of people get their information, and often their opinions from television, so who decides what appears on our screens is of fundamental importance. I don’t want Rupert Murdoch cornering the market again- as happened with satellite TV - and snuffing out the competition. Choice and diversity are crucially important. And the BBC, as the quality public service broadcaster, should be allocated its fair share of the new channels that become available.”

The MP has been pressing the broadcasting authorities “to correct the anomaly” in West Craven where many people cannot pick up signals from BBC North West and Granada. “DTB may offer a solution in the mid term - in 1998. But I am pressing for action now to give people in Barnoldswick and parts of Earby and the surrounding villages the option of tuning into North West TV if that is their choice. If they want to stay with Yorkshire TV, which brings news from as far away as Lincolnshire, that’s OK by me.”

230/95: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1995

BARROWFORD SHOW HIT BY RAIN

The 75th Barrowford Agricultural Show last Saturday (26 August) was hit by rain after weeks of cloudless skies over Pendle. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who was at the popular event said:

"After all the hard work and enthusiasm that goes into the show from countless unsung heroes it was a tragedy the weather turned sour. Although everyone enjoyed themselves, the rain must have kept a lot of people away."

"Barrowford has had a hard time with the elements recently. Last week the village was at a standstill when a water main burst. A year ago Barrowford was almost flooded out. Eighteen months ago streets were submerged in a raging torrent. And now this."

"Barrowford deserves a break" said the MP

Note to Editors: Families were flooded out in December 1993 and it was touch and go whether history would repeat itself in July 1994 when the area was again drenched by torrential rain. Last August, the Managing Dircetor of North West Water, Derek Green, told the Pendle MP the recurrent flooding problems in Barrowford would be tackled in the current financial year (95/6).

231/95: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1995

PENDLE MP BACKS AIR STRIKES

The use of air strikes earlier today against Bosnian Serbs was entirely justified says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the carnage in Sarajevo, where 37 people died when a mortar crashed into the market place, could not go unanswered.

“It has always been my view that UN designated safe areas should be just that - safe. The Bosnian Serbs have committed the most appalling acts of butchery and genocide as they have systematically “ethnically cleansed” the territory they have captured by force.”

“Over two years ago I called in the House of Commons for action to stop the aggression and genocide in Bosnia. I wanted the United Nations to issue an ultimatum to the Serbs, warning that continued aggression would result in military action. What has now happened is long overdue.”

"I have always believed that doing nothing would simply give the green light to fascists and nationalists in Eastern Europe and elsewhere who have territorial ambitions. And doing nothing would also send signals to the Islamic world which would criticize the West for standing aside while Muslims were being slaughtered in their thousands."

Note to Editors: In April 1993, the Pendle MP backed the following Early Day Motion in the Commons: "This House views with horror the inhuman assaults upon Srebrenica and other civilian populations in Bosnia; condemns territorial aggression and the policy of ethnic cleansing whether by Serbian or Croat forces; is revolted by the evidence of mass rape used as a deliberate strategy of war; doubts that sanctions alone will succeed; calls upon the United Nations to declare an ultimatum and, should that fail, to take decisive military action to end Serbian aggression; and therefore

warmly welcomes the Leader of the Labour Party's statement on the use of air power in Bosnia".

232/95: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1995

MP STEPS INTO ROW OVER AREA COMMITTEES

The controversial new Area Committees set up by the Liberal controlled Pendle Council should be put under the microscope according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

In a letter to the Council's Chief Executive the MP is asking for details of how the new structure is to be financed.

The MP said: "I saw comments in the local press from one councillor who said he would be seeking to get for his area "a touch more than its fair share". This obviously raises fundamental questions about how council spending is allocated across Pendle. It doesn't follow that just because an area contributes more to the Council's coffers, in terms of Council Tax, it should necessarily expect a bigger slice of the council services cake."

"For as long as I can remember Pendle has been bedevilled by accusations and counter accusations that town "x" is being given preferential treatment over town "y". The new area committees provide an opportunity to bring openness and transparency into the whole debate. Once we know how money is allocated, the local councillors will use their own judgements about distributing it fairly. But at least everyone else will have the facts at their fingertips rather than rumour and conjecture."

The MP has asked for details of Council spending at sub-Borough level - by ward, by county council division, by town and by new area committee. He also wants to know what steps the Council is taking to make resource allocation across the Borough more transparent to the outside observer.

233/95: For Immediate Release: 30 August 1995

GUMMER BASHES WATER CUSTOMERS

"Environment Secretary, John Gummer, is bashing the water customers and sticking up for the overpaid bosses of the privatised water companies" says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP's comments come in the wake of lashing rain in Pendle which has followed weeks of cloudless, blue skies.

The MP said: "The recent downpours are welcome - if only to replenish the shrinking reservoirs. Millions of gallons have leaked from pipes that are little better than collanders. The rain gives us a respite but the fundamental question remains. Who is responsible for the situation we find ourselves in?"

"John Gummer has decided that water customers should shoulder the blame for wasting water. He has refused to set tough leakage targets for the water companies who waste 80% of all the water that's wasted. He says he will leave it to them to decide. This is the kind of attitude that is infuriating local people."

"However, he has made it clear he won't be satisfied until every home is forced to have a water meter. He won't let the companies fix charges in in line with council tax bands like they do in Scotland. That is a solution that would help us enormously here in Pendle where the overwhelming majority of our houses are in bands A and B. But John Gummer thinks it's better to force customers to spend up to £200 in every home to install a water meter. I believe no-one should be forced to have a water meter."

“It can cost as much as £200 to install a water meter. That would give a total cost of £4-£5 billion to cover the whole country. That would meet the cost of replacing all the clapped-out trains on the railways or 40-50 new hospitals. On top of that, a metered billing system could cost up to half a billion pounds a year to run.”

“Two weeks ago, John Gummer claimed that it would cost too much for the companies to reduce their leaks. Now the Government recognises that substantial reductions in leakage

Water

could be achieved, but still go on about the costs. But the companies are rolling in money. Last year, their profits exceeded £1,700 million. Yet the most any company spent in England on identifying and combating leaks was £15.8 million.”

“Privatisation of water cost the taxpayer a fortune. The companies were allowed to write off £5 billion in debt to the taxpayer and the Government gave them a "green dowry" of taxpayers' money of £1.5 billion. Since then, water prices have risen by 77 per cent and water profits by 166 per cent. The water chiefs’ pay has gone up by 343% and their perks by £24 million.”

Note to Editors: More than three years after publishing their consultation paper Using Water Wisely the Government have just published their policy document on water entitled Water Conservation: Government Action. This document is extremely complacent it piles most of the responsibility for water conservation on to the customers, lets the companies off the hook and promotes water metering.

The Wrong Target No fewer than 56 paragraphs of this 71 paragraph report are devoted to water conservation by customers and of those no fewer than 29 paragraphs promote the idea of everybody having to have a meter. Just nine paragraphs cover the matter of leaks from water company pipes and conclude that the Government should not set targets for leak reduction. This is to be left to the companies. 80 per cent of water wasted in England and Wales is wasted by the companies.

John Gummer said on radio and TV that he had taken new powers in the Environment Act to get water companies to conserve water and this would get them to set tough leakage targets. This was simply not true. The Environment Bill places a duty on companies to promote the effective use of water by customers. Labour said it should be extended to cover the companies' own activities, but the Government refused.

The Government and the Water Regulator are obsessed with metering but there is no real need for it. The companies charge for water on the basis of rateable values. These are now very out of date and need to be replaced. In Scotland, water charging is based on Council Tax bands and that works well. Labour believes it should be permitted here. The Government refuse. That's because they want to promote metering.

Meters would deter water use, but as is usual with the price mechanism applied to essentials it would deter the poorest most - like the million households with someone who is incontinent or those families with children who already can't make ends meet. So metering would be expensive and unfair. It would place the greatest burdens on the worst off.

234/95: For immediate release: 4 September 1995

MP DEMANDS ACCESS TO FOREST OF BOWLAND

(Press Conference and Photocall Wednesday, 13 September at Scorton, near Garstang - see below)

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for full access to the Forest of Bowland where large tracts of open country are out of bounds to the public. The MP says ramblers should have access to the countryside unless there are legitimate reasons for excluding them.

The MP said: "Next Wednesday, I shall be gathering with ramblers on open moorland owned by the Duke of Westminster where he has recently erected new "PRIVATE" signs to deter walkers."

I shall be calling on the landlords of Bowland to sit down with the Ramblers' Association and negotiate an access agreement giving the public the freedom to roam on their land. Most of the reasons for keeping people out are entirely spurious. An access agreement made under the 1949 National Parks and Access to Countryside Act would protect the legitimate interests of farmers and others who use and manage the land."

"The clock is ticking for landowners who put up "Private" and "Keep Out" signs on open land where public access would cause no harm or nuisance. An incoming Labour Government is pledged to open up the countryside while safeguarding the legitimate rights of those who live and work on the land. No-one is suggesting for one moment that it should be open season everywhere. Cultivated land is obviously out of bounds and the same is true for land that is home to rare plants and wildlife or for some other legitimate reason must be protected. But the presumption must be in favour of access. So far as I am concerned there must be very good reasons indeed why people should be kept out. The mere fact of ownership should not, in itself, be reason enough to deny people access to open land."

More follows

MP Demands Access to Land

Note to Editors: The Press Conference will be held in the Priory Tea Rooms, Scorton, near Garstang, Lancashire at 11am on Wed 13 September. Scorton is a small village on the edge of the Forest of Bowland a few miles north of Garstang. It is accessible from and to the east of the A6.

Photo opportunity at 11.40am. from the Priory Tearooms turn right (north) up the main road in Scorton which soon crosses the motorway. Keep on this road (going straight over a crossroads 2.5 miles from Scorton and a cattle grid 2 miles later). The photo opportunity will take place at the "PRIVATE" sign on moorland to the right of

the road 5 miles from Scorton, half a mile after the cattle grid. It is a ten minute drive from Scorton.

Speakers: Gordon Prentice MP; Kate Ashbrook (Ramblers Association National Chairperson); Alan Howard (Chair of Ramblers' Bowland Access Committee) and a local rambler.

Landowners include: the Duchy of Lancaster (Birkett Fell and large sections of woods in Hodder Valley), the Duke of Westminster (Hawthornthwaite Fell, Blanch Fell, Blaze Moss, Catshaw Fell, Duckenshaw Fell and more), R.L. Jepson of Nova Scotia Mills, Blackburn (Summersgill Fell) and others.

235/95: For Immediate Release: 7 September 1995

MP SAYS DUKE OF YORK "SHOULD FLY BRITISH AIRWAYS"

The use of an aircraft from the Royal Squadron (formerly the Queen's Flight) to fly the Duke of York to Scotland for the British Open Golf Championship at St Andrews at a cost to the taxpayer of £4,500 was a misuse of public money according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says Prince Andrew, a keen golfer, should fly British Airways and save the nation a fortune.

Prentice said: "I can understand the argument that the Head of State - and, perhaps, the heir to the throne - should have access to specially designated aircraft but to extend this to other members of the Royal Family is, I believe, going too far. Where will it all end?"

"A few days ago the newspapers were full of the story of Lieutenant Colonel Douglas Connon, Commanding Officer of the 3rd Highlanders who used an army helicopter to get to a golf tournament at Prestwick, sending his driver on by car in a journey of 220 miles with his golf clubs. One way or another, golf is costing the nation an arm and a leg."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP received this letter from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, James Arbuthnot MP on 29 August:

"Thank you for your letter of 14 August to Michael Portillo about Prince Andrew's visit to the British Open Golf Championship at St Andrews. I am replying in the absence of Frederick Howe, who has Ministerial responsibility for this matter.

First, I should explain that the status of The Queen's Flight has changed, and that it no longer exists in its previous form. Following the outcome of a Cabinet Office efficiency scrutiny of Royal, VIP and communications flying, The Queen's Flight moved from RAF Benson to RAF Northolt and amalgamated with No. 32 Squadron on 1 April this year, to form No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron. The role of The Queen's Flight, provision of a safe, secure and flexible method of transport appropriate to Her Majesty The Queen's position as Head of State, is fully met by the new Squadron.

As you may know, other members of the Royal Family can, with the

More follows

agreement of Her Majesty, use No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron aircraft in pursuance of their Royal duties. Press reports on the Duke of York's visit to St Andrews were misleading as they did not make clear that Prince Andrew
was attending the British Open in his official capacity at the invitation of the Royal and Ancient. The Duke of York's attendance at the event was announced in the Court Circular in the normal way. I can, therefore, confirm that the Prince's use of the aircraft was entirely appropriate.

You may wish to know that the Prince was originally allocated one of the Squadron's smaller HS 125 aircraft, but this was urgently needed for a flight to Bosnia. Consequently the Prince was allocated one of the Squadron's larger BAe 146 aircraft.

I hope this is helpful.

JAMES ARBUTHNOT MP

236/95: For Immediate Release: 4 September 1995

US POWER COMPANIES EYEING UP NORWEB IN NEW TAKEOVER DRAMA

The privatised North West electricity company, Norweb, could fall into the hands of an American energy company according to City speculation. Last Friday its shares soared 25p to 896p, valuing the company at £1.4 billion.

The takeover fever was triggered by the decision of the Government last week not to intervene in the moves by the American Southern Company to bid for South West Electricity by referring the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The regional electricity companies are ripe for takeovers with Scottish Power bidding for Manweb and the Hanson group for Eastern Electricity.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The Government has given these privatised companies a license to print money. The thought of my constituents paying shockingly inflated bills with the profits streaming across the Atlantic to American shareholders really takes the biscuit."

"The Government has allowed the asset strippers to run riot in the privatised utilities. Prices have been allowed to shoot up and now, with the promise of fat profits in future, the companies are being put under the hammer, each one going to the highest bidder."

"The answer is not to allow our electricity companies to be flogged off overseas but to regulate them in the interests of the consumers."

Note to Editors: Electricity prices caused a storm this time last year when the review of electricity prices produced by Professor Stephen Littlechild, the Electricity Regulator, was described by Pendle MP as a con trick. The regulator suggested he ordered price cuts which would cause the typical household's bill to fall dramatically. Here in Pendle the typical electricity bill for a NORWEB domestic consumer in April 1995 was £319.69 - up from £283.93 in August 1994.

Electricity

Last year, the National Consumer Council accused the electricity supply industry of overcharging customers. This year, the 12 regional electricity companies, National

Power and PowerGen have seen profits rise by an average of 15 per cent - four times the rate of inflation.

• The electricity industry has made £14.5 billion in profits since privatisation - £9.2 billion in the regional electricity companies and £5.3 billion in the generating companies. Profits this year are set to rise by an average of 15 per cent

Like every other utility, privatisation has been quickly followed by job cuts. In the privatised electricity industry, 40,000 jobs have been slashed since privatisation

Electricity prices
• Despite the 'RPI-X' formula for capping electricity price rises, the price of electricity rose by 2.3 per cent above the rate of inflation between April 1991 and April 1995.

• The National Consumer Council, in its report last year, said prices in the electricity industry were too high, and that customers had been overcharged by £650m - £20 per household.

Salaries have sky-rocketed: • payments to the boards of National Power, PowerGen and the National Grid were £5.3m in 1994, compared to £646,000 to the board of CEGB in 1988/89 - before privatisation • the board of National Power awarded itself a 25% pay rise (£500,000) in 1994 and its workers an average of 4.25%.

The table below shows how many years it takes for 1.3m people on £2.50 an hour to earn what the highest paid directors earn in a month:

	Annual Salary	Monthly salary	Years it takes someone on £2.50ph to earn one month's director's pay
Eastern	£341,000	£28,417	5.75
Northern	£303,000	£25,250	5.11
Southern	£285,000	£23,750	4.81
London	£273,782	£22,815	4.62
Manweb	£259,000	£21,583	4.34
East Midlands	£250,084	£20,840	4.22
Yorkshire	£239,982	£19,998	4.05
Norweb	£236,874	£19,739	3.99
SouthWestern	£236,000	£19,666	3.98
Midlands	£231,802	£19,317	3.91
South Wales	£227,345	£18,945	3.83
Seeboard	£210,000	£17,500	3.54

237/95: For Immediate Release: 4 September 1995

AREA COMMITTEES - WHO GETS WHAT?

A special meeting of Pendle Council's Policy and Resources Committee is to be held on Wednesday, 27 September to look at the allocation of resources to each of the five areas and the methods to be used to allocate budgets to each committee.

In a letter to local MP, Gordon Prentice, Pendle's Chief Executive, Stephen Barnes, says his report "will show how budgets in total are divided between the central committees

and the area committees in a clear and transparent methodology". Last week, the MP called for details on how the Council intended to fund the new structure.

The MP commented: "This is precisely what I have been looking for and, now the new committees are up and running, I wait with interest to see what the report says about their financing."

"The issue of how resources are allocated across the Borough is absolutely critical at this time when spending decisions are to be devolved to the five areas - each with different profiles and sometimes with very different needs. The spending of public money, whether collected through tax or received by grant or as income from services, has to be done in a way that is fair and is seen to be so."

"Given all the controversy, an unexpected bonus of the new structure is that it will focus attention on the needs of our Borough. The facts that emerge from the Chief Executive's report may well blow to smithereens all the old arguments about some areas of Pendle always doing better than others."

238/95: For Immediate Release: 5 September 1995

PENDLE MP CONDEMNS FRENCH NUCLEAR TEST

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has described this evening's French nuclear test in the Pacific atoll of Mururoa as an outrage. He says the explosion - ordered by President Chirac - is unnecessary and unacceptable. The MP says the test is the product of "macho posturing" by the newly elected French President.

"What the French have done is simply unacceptable. What on earth do they think they are playing at? What would their reaction have been if Iraq or Algeria had detonated a device with the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb?"

"The boycott of French goods by Pacific countries and by our Commonwealth partners in Australia and New Zealand deserves our full support. I shall certainly be giving French wine and cheese a miss as my own personal protest at what has happened. I am sure many others will be doing the same. If the nuclear test is so safe then why don't the French do it in Corsica?"

Note to Editors: In July the Pendle MP condemned the French authorities for sending in French commandos to seize forcibly the Greenpeace ship, “Rainbow Warrior” as it sailed into the exclusion zone around Mururoa atoll.

The MP was outside the French Embassy in London on 10 July joining with others to commemorate the sinking of the first Rainbow Warrior blown up a decade ago by the French with loss of life.

At that time, the Pendle MP said there was no need to explode a nuclear device. "President Chirac’s predecessor, President Mitterand, saw no need for it and he had access to exactly the same kind of scientific and technical information the new French leader has to hand. It can be done by computer simulation.”

239/95: For Immediate Release: 7 September 1995

MP TO TACKLE YORKSHIRE ELECTRICITY CHIEF OVER “DERELICT” BARLICK SHOWROOM

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to tackle Yorkshire Electricity chief executive, Malcolm Chatwin, about the company's "decaying" showroom in Church Street, Barnoldswick, which closed in March 1993. Two and a half years later it is still empty and waiting a buyer. The original decision to pull out of Barnoldswick provoked a furious row.

The Pendle MP has been invited to a meeting next month with the electricity chiefs at the Labour Party's annual conference in Brighton where the sparks are sure to fly. Yorkshire has told MPs they will respond to any questions MPs may raise.

Prentice said: "I want to know what is going to happen to the showroom in the town where I live which has been closed for absolutely ages. I said at the time that Yorkshire Electricity's decision was the start of a slippery slope and we have now lost magnet shops that draw people into the town."

"Last year I wrote to the Environment Secretary to find out what assessment the Government had made of the economic and social effects of these pull-outs on small and medium sized towns. The answer I got was worse than useless. In 1993 I raise the wider question with the then Chancellor, Norman Lamont, and I received a reply from one of his understudies saying that retail trends were encouraging."

"Almost a year ago - on 19 September - I had a meeting with Malcolm Chatwin to discuss various issues concerning the privatised electricity industry and Yorkshire Electricity in particular and I specifically raised the Barlick showroom closure. He made reassuring noises. But if the company can't sell the property why can't they do something useful such as leasing it at a peppercorn rent to a charity or some other organisation who would at least get people back into town."

More Follows

Yorkshire Electricity

Note to Editors: Last August, the Pendle MP slammed the review of electricity prices produced by Professor Stephen Littlechild, the Electricity Regulator. The MP said the so-called price cuts were an illusion. Prentice claimed the percentage cut of 14% was only being imposed on one third of the household electricity bill. The other two thirds was not touched while the whole of the bill would still carry VAT of 9.5% on 1 April 1995 on top of the 1994 increase of 8%. The typical bill for a Yorkshire Electricity consumer this year is £313.89, an increase of £35.11p on last year."

240/95: For Immediate Release: 11 September 1995

MP SAYS NO TO CEMFUEL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be challenging Castle Cement in Clitheroe to come clean about the health effects of burning the new fuel, Cemfuel. The MP says there are conventional alternatives to the controversial fuel.

The MP will be attending a public meeting on the subject "Cemfuel vs Health" next Wednesday (20 September) in the Civic Hall (Cinema) in Clitheroe called by the group "Residents against Toxic Substances". Speakers will include Dr Dick Van Steenis, a retired GP with a particular interest in asthma.

The MP said: “Although Castle Cement is next door in Ribble Valley I have a clear interest. In certain weather conditions I am sure the smoke drifts across into my constituency. Smoke and fumes do not respect lines on maps."

In June, the Pendle MP hailed the report of the House of Commons Environment Select Committee on the burning of Cemfuel. At the time he described it as a “breath of fresh air”. The report proposed strict tests and monitoring before the fuel is given the all clear to be burned in cement kilns.

Note to Editors: In February 1995, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. The consultation period ended on 29 March. In June, the House of Commons Environment Committee published a report making the following recommendations:

BURNING OF SECONDARY LIQUID FUEL IN CEMENT KILNS

1. We have received considerable amounts of written evidence on the burning of Secondary Liquid Fuel in cement kilns, and have questioned witnesses representing the cement, waste management and solvent blending industries, as well as Friends of the Earth, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution and the Department of the Environment. Having considered with great care the evidence presented to us, much of which is published with this Report, we have reached the following conclusions.

2. We recommend that the Government formally classify Secondary Liquid Fuel (SLF) as waste (if necessary, by amending the law) thus applying the

Duty of Care to all shipments of SLF to kilns and formally bringing the burning of SLF in kilns within the scope of the E U Hazardous Waste Incineration Directive.

3. If the burning of SLF is to continue, HMIP must enforce their own standards more effectively, and not be put off by commercial arguments such as the possible termination of contracts. For example, trials should be limited in duration and should not be allowed to continue unless the conditions of the HMIP Protocol can be complied with.

4. Were commend that the adaptation of kilns to burn SLF should be designated a "substantial change" under Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, thus requiring a new authorisation.

5. We strongly recommend that as a minimum HMIP apply additional controls to ensure that the emissions from burning coal plus SLF are no more polluting than those from burning coal alone. This would mean that:
the specification for SLF should be tightened up so that it is a cleaner fuel than coal, in terms of metals content etc, and/or
effective abatement technology should be fitted, in order to trap the emissions which currently escape during kiln upsets.

6. There is much evidence to suggest that the monitoring data collected so far is not of sufficient quality for any firm conclusions to be drawn on the environmental impact of burning SLF.We urge HMIP to ensure that future monitoring exercises take into account the full range of kiln operating conditions and that monitoring be carried out whilst fuel of the "worst " allowable specification is being burned. The

number of samples taken must be sufficient to ensure that the results are statistically significant.We also recommend that "baseline" conditions be comprehensively monitored before any further trials commence.

7. We recommend that HMIP carry out a more detailed analysis of the precipitator dust from kilns which burn SLF and its potential to contaminate soils and ground water. If it is found to be an environmental hazard, it should be reclassified as Special Waste, which would bring it under a strict regulatory regime. We also recommend that HMIP take immediate action to tackle the more general pollution problems associated with kilns.

8. We urge the cement industry and HMIP to ensure that local residents are properly informed and given the opportunity to express their views on the burning of SLF.

9. We recommend that the Government carry out a thorough survey of human and animal health in the vicinity of the kilns (both those burning SLF and those burning only coal) in order to establish or disprove the alleged links between kiln pollution and health effects.

241/95: For Immediate Release: 7 September 1995

NORTH WEST WATER/NORWEB MERGER SLAMMED BY MP

The threatened merger between North West Water and Norweb would not be in the interests of the region or its people says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. It is merger mania.

Speaking today as the news broke, the MP said: “They are the terrible twins of the North West. Since privatisation these utilities have been ripping off consumers and paying their directors telephone number salaries. If the proposed merger is carried through it will be down to the prospect of fat profits rather than giving a better service to millions of people in the region. And what about the future of the 5,000 people who work for North West Water and the 7,600 employed by Norweb?”

“Water and electricity don't mix. The consequences for people in the North West will be truly shocking.”

Note to Editors: Today’s Lex Column in the **Financial Times** reads: The logic of a merger between an electricity and water utility would be financial. Combining Norweb and NorthWest Water would offer scope for cost savings; given their geographical overlap, the savings would probably be greater than deals between two electricity companies. Billing, meterreading and head offices could all be rationalised, though the water regulator might force some of the savings to be shared with customers. The different cash profiles of the two industries - electricity companies are cash-generative, while the water companies are consuming cash - would also make a neat fit. Nevertheless, Norweb shareholders will rightly wonder whether a merger is in their best interests, particularly since their company is top of the list of rumoured takeover targets. One way of assuaging concerns would be to distribute surplus cash to investors at the same time as agreeing a merger.

242/95: For Immediate Release: 11 September 1995

SMASH AND GRAB VANDALS "MORONIC" SAYS MP

The vandals who smashed a plate glass window at the Barnoldswick office of the popular local newspaper, the Town Crier, have been dubbed "moronic" by the town's MP, Gordon Prentice.

The raiders caused £250 of damage when they smashed a side window and grabbed a bottle of champagne which had been sitting on a pedestal for over a year as part of a window display.

The MP said: "The champagne would have had plenty of time to develop its own distinctive character. It would have boiled in the summer sunshine after months of being chilled in the Barlick winter. It was probably totally undrinkable."

"I hope they choke on it."

243/95: For Immediate Release: 12 September 1995

MP TO CALL FOR ACCESS TO LAND ON "OPEN BRITAIN" DAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joined by Shadow Environment Secretary, Frank Dobson MP, at a rally to promote "Open Britain Day" on Sunday, 24 September at 12 noon at Penistone Hill Country Park near Haworth. The MPs and speakers from the Ramblers Association will be calling for public access to moorland and open country.

The Pendle MP, whose constituency includes Boulsworth Hill, a ridge of rough moorland rising to 1700 feet where there is only limited access, is a firm champion of the right to roam across open land. "Restricting public access is a hangover from feudal days. The Forest of Bowland is no longer, of course, a forest as we understand the term. It amounts to over 300 square miles of beautiful landscape, much of it open country. In the middle ages it was reserved for the King as a royal hunting forest for deer and other game and poachers in these days didn't live to tell the tale. Today, people rightly are demanding access to open country and an incoming Labour Government will give them that right."

Note to Editors: In the 1950s there was not even a footpath over a four and a half mile length of moorland at Boulsworth Hill. All footpaths ended at the foot of the moor. There was a public inquiry on 20 and 21 March 1956 and the public were told they could gaze at Boulsworth Hill from the road. When the Inquiry Report went to the Minister he ordered the County Council to establish a footpath along the top of the hill. There was plenty of resistance from landowners and it took another twenty two years for a three mile long U shaped permissive (ie no legal right of access) path to the summit to be agreed.

Note 2 to Editors: This **Wednesday at 11am (13 September)** the Pendle MP will be giving a Press Conference on access to land in the Forest of Bowland in the Priory Tea Rooms, Scorton, near Garstang, Lancashire. It will be followed by a **photo opportunity** at 11.40am at the "PRIVATE" sign on moorland owned by the Duke of Westminster. Speakers will include Gordon Prentice MP; Kate Ashbrook (Ramblers Association National Chairperson); Alan Howard (Chair of Ramblers' Bowland Access Committee).

244/95: For Immediate Release: 11 September 1995

MP FURIOUS OVER LEAKY PIPES

A press release sent out by North West Water saying they are to redouble their efforts to repair leaky pipes has sent local MP, Gordon Prentice, into a spin. "Their brass neck is awesome."

"For absolutely ages I have been pressing North West Water chief, Sir Desmond Pitcher, to fix the leakiest main in Lancashire at Foulridge. All we've had are promises and now I want a firm start date for this work. The pipe is a collander. It burst twice in 1988, once in 91, once in 1992 and no fewer than three times in 1993."

"North West Water is not investing enough in dealing with leaks. They have cut their investment in water distribution by a collosal 39% (£103m) over the last two years. No wonder they had problems dealing with the drought."

"Now the pipe manufacturers are saying fewer new pipes are being bought by the water companies. The sale of new pipes has fallen from just short of 9,000 kilometers in 1991 to less than 8,000 kilometers today. North West Water ought to spend more on repairing leaks and less on public relations."

Note to Editors: The following figures show that investment in water distribution has fallen by around 27% over the past two years.

Company	1992/3 investment in £m	1994/5 investment in £m	Difference in £ millions	Difference %
Anglian	£197.1	£158.5	-£38.6	-20%
Thames	£226.1	£172.5	-£53.6	-24%
Wessex	£44.4	£32.9	-£11.5	-26%
Yorkshire	**£169.8**	**£125**	**-£44.8**	**-26%**
Severn Trent	£281.4	£199.5	-£81.9	-29%
North West	**£264.8**	**£161.0**	**-£103.8**	**-39%**
South West	£64.5	£38.5	-£26	-40%
Northumbria n	£36.7	£16.6	-£20.1	-57%
Southern	£30.3	£30.4	+£0.1	+1%
Welsh	£111	£112	+£1.8	+2%
Total	£1426.1	£1047.7	-£378.4	-27%

245/95: For Immediate Release: 11 September 1995

RISE IN YOUNG JOBLESS

The number of young people out of work has gone up in every part of the country including here in the North West says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Figures released by the MP in April showed that that 17.8% of Pendle's unemployed young people were out of work for over a year. The number of jobless young people in the Borough was the 5th highest of the North West Region's 20 Travel to Work Areas.

The MP said: "The latest rise in the jobless total is all at the expense of people under 25. Here in the North West there are now 82,700 young people officially without a job. Unemployment is bad for us all. It's bad for the young people with no job; it's

bad for their parents and for the rest of us. We don't get the benefit of the goods or services all these people could provide. They don't get paid. Instead they have to rely on benefits and we lose taxes they would pay if they w ere in work."

"The Government is ignoring the job crisis of young people. They either don't mention jobs at all or pretend there isn't a crisis. But even the official figures show that 216,000 young people have had neither a job not training."

Note to Editors: The table below shows youth unemployment by region:

Region	April 95	July 95
North West	**79,400**	**82,700**
South East	84,100	87,500
Greater London	95,700	98,500
East Anglia	18,400	18,400
South West	44,100	44,700
West Midlands	59,700	63,500
East Midlands	42,300	43,900
Yorks & Humberside	61,400	64,100
North	42,900	44,400
Wales	32,600	35,600
Scotland	58,800	63,700
Great Britain	619,400	647,100

246/95: For Immediate Release: 13 September 1995

NO CHANGE IN PENDLE JOBLESS

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit in August was 2,266 - seven down on the July figure of 2,273. The August rate stands at 6.2% - the same as July - up from 5.8% in June.

1,748 men were unemployed in Pendle and 518 women. There were 227 vacancies at the Job Centre in Nelson and 159 at Colne.

The UK unemployment figure for August came in at 2,295,400 (8.2%) compared with 2,315,300 (8.3%) for July. The August figure for the north west (excluding Cumbria) was 249,000 (8.6%). In July it was 252,100 (8.7%).

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Overall, the trend is downwards although the figures have been revised and recalculated so often the official series must be viewed with some caution. Jobs are being created but too often they are low paid and part-time replacing good, well paid full-time jobs."

"Nearly 11 million people have been out of work at some point in the last five years and long term unemployment in the UK remains well over three quarters of a million - 37% of those unemployed. In March 1990 the country's workforce in employment consisted of 27.1 million people. Figures for March this year show there are now 25.6 million. This means that 1.5 million jobs have been lost in the recession and have not been replaced."

The MP added: "Astonishing as it may seem, Britain has lost 40% of its manufacturing employment over the past 15 years."

247/95: For Immediate Release: 11 September 1995

NO RESERVOIR OF SYMPATHY FOR WATER COMPANIES

The chiefs of North West Water and Yorkshire Water have told Pendle MP Gordon Prentice that the sale of 24 of their reservoirs since privatisation had no bearing on the water supply problems which gripped the companies during this summer's drought.

The MP said: "Sir Desmond Pitcher and Sir Gordon Jones have both now assured me the reservoirs were not used for collection but for storage and, in any case, were no longer up to the job. I am in no position to challenge what appears to be a plain statement of fact but commonsense alone tells me something needs to be done about the collection reservoirs and, of course, the infamous leaks."

"The National Rivers Authority report on the drought of 1995 has poured cold water over the recent statements of the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, that we have seen a big reduction in rainfall. That is simply not the case. Over the last 12 months Britain has received 96% of its normal rainfall. Indeed, the summer drought was preceded by levels of rainfall during the winter which left reservoirs full, unlike the earlier droughts of 1984 and 1976 which were preceded by dry winters."

Note to Editors: Over the last four years, Yorkshire Water has disposed of 20 reservoirs and towers used to store water. Since privatisation North West Water has sold four reservoirs on the grounds they were old and cost too much to maintain. The NRA is so concerned about the situation in Yorkshire, North West Water and South West Water that they have asked these companies to file weekly reports. In the North West, at the end of August, Haweswater and Thirlmere reservoir was 27% full when the average for this time of year is 60%; Longdendale reservoir is 34% full (59%) and the LCUS (Lancashire Conjunctive Use Scheme) 25% full (46%).

248/95: For Immediate Release: 13 September 1995

"WHERE HAVE ALL THE BEDS GONE?"

Shock statistics unearthed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, tell of disappearing beds in our local hospitals. The number of acute beds has shrunk by a fifth since 1984. In England the figure is nearly a quarter (23%). Since the health reforms were introduced in 1991 the number of acute beds nationwide has slumped by 6%.

Prentice said: "In England as a whole one in three hospital beds has been lost over the last decade. And 86 hospital closures are in the pipeline - including 21 which provide acute services for patients."

"No-one is suggesting the NHS should be pickled in aspic. It must change and adapt to new circumstances. Populations grow. People move. But when hospitals are closed and beds are lost the full facts and reasoning should be made available to the public and press. The Government has consistently refused to answer questions about the pattern, pace or impact of hospital closures."

Table: Average daily number of available beds, wards open night and day (ie 24 hours) in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale

Year	Total*	Acute	Geriatric	Mental Illness	Maternity
1982	2,513	710	305	228	100
1983	2,516	713	306	244	100
1984	2,438	685	295	263	98
1985	2,399	682	285	263	99
1986	2,303	657	284	268	80
1987/8	3,216	612	286	262	70
1988/9	3,008	566	287	260	76
1989/90	2,802	565	277	249	65
1990/1	2,564	551	264	241	63
1991/2	2,233	538	228	198	63
1992/3	2,203	556	216	200	55
1993/4	2,198	567	189	205	71

* excludes neonatal cots in maternity wards
Source: Bed Availability in England 1993-4

249/95: For Immediate Release: 19 September 1995

PHOTOCALL: ROBIN COOK MP
at 8pm on Thursday 21 September at the Colne Municipal Hall, Albert Road, Colne.

Shadow Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook MP, will be giving the Pendle Labour Party's special centenary Sydney Silverman lecture at a public meeting at 8pm at Colne's Municipal Hall. Joining him on the platform will be local MP, Gordon Prentice, and CLP chair, Dr Tony Pickles.

Sydney Silverman was born 100 years ago on 8 October 1895 and represented Nelson and Colne (now part of the Pendle constituency) in Parliament for 33 years.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says: "Sydney Silverman is best known for his campaign for the abolition of the death penalty but there was much, much more to him than that. He had a deep hatred of poverty and a deep hatred of war."

Note to Editors: On Silverman's death, the Editor of the Nelson Leader wrote: "It is no use pretending that Mr Sydney Silverman was the area's most lovable character. It just would not be true. He was a prickly little man. Irascible. Testy. Touchy. Quick to take offence. Slow to forgive a mistake. And, for a man so long in public life, extraordinarily sensitive to opposition or criticism.... I have joked with him amid the conviviality of the working men's club one day and wrangled with him over the telephone the next. He could chuckle impishly like Shakespeare's Robin Goodfellow. Or he could rasp out a verbal whiplash with the venom of a serpent. You could never be sure just what mood you had him in, but either way you could not deny him these things: Sydney Silverman had a razor's edge brain which could cut a clearly defined course through the maziest situation. He had the incisive verbal gift to equal the brain - once, indeed, being rated in Parliament the next best debater to Churchill himself. He was an acknowledged expert on Parliamentary procedure. And however wrong he might or might not have been in the courses chosen, he was politically sincere..."

250/95: For Immediate Release: 19 September 1995

YORKSHIRE ELECTRICITY SHOWROOM TO GO UNDER THE HAMMER

The former Yorkshire Electricity showroom in Church Street, Barnoldswick could be auctioned in a last desperate bid to shift the property which has been on the Market since March 1993.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been a thorn in the side of the privatised electricity company, pressing them to do something about the showroom which he described last week as “decaying”.

The MP said: “It is an absolute disgrace that the shop has been sitting empty for two and a half years, blighting one of the town’s main shopping thoroughfares. Giant businesses such as Yorkshire Electricity can afford to keep shops empty for years on end, almost forgetting they exist. Now it looks as if things are moving and this prime site shop will be auctioned.”

Note to Editors: Malcolm Chatwin, Chief Executive of Yorkshire Electricity wrote to the Pendle MP on 13 September as follows:
“As requested I set out below the progress made in disposing of Barnoldswick shop following its closure in 1993.

“Yorkshire Electricity hold the freehold for the site and appointed agents J Trevor and Webster to manage the sale. There has been some interest from prospective purchasers intending to use the upper floors for residential use, for which planning permission would be necessary. Solicitors have been instructed on two occasions, but in both cases the offers were withdrawn before the sale was completed.

“Yorkshire Electricity is anxious to dispose of the property as quickly as possible. As there has been no significant interest in the property this year we are currently reviewing whether we should sell the property by auction rather than private sale.

“Since the closure of Barnoldswick shop, Yorkshire Electricity has arranged free of charge payment facilities for electricity bills at all 1,200 Post Offices in the region. This will have mitigated some of the impacts of the Barnoldswick shop closure on your constituents.

254/95: For Immediate Release: 22 September 1995

PHOTOCALL: JANET STREET-PORTER, FRANK DOBSON MP,
GORDON PRENTICE MP
on Sunday, 24 September at 12 noon at Penistone Hill Country Park near Haworth.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining Shadow Environment Secretary, Frank Dobson MP, and President of the Ramblers Association, Janet Street-Porter at a rally to promote "Open Britain Day" on Sunday, 24 September at 12 noon at Penistone Hill Country Park near Haworth. The MPs and speakers from the Ramblers Association will be calling for public access to moorland and open country.

The Pendle MP said: "The rally is a call for freedom to roam among moors in the Bronte country where access is severely restricted or banned. Boulsworth Hill, in my own constituency, is a very visible reminder of unfinished business. The limited

access to the top was only won in 1978. I don't want to be told to stick to a narrow path when all around is moorland and open country. These restrictions will simply have to go."

Note to Editors: In the 1950s there was not even a footpath over a four and a half mile length of moorland at Boulsworth Hill. All footpaths ended at the foot of the moor. There was a public inquiry on 20 and 21 March 1956 and the public were told they could gaze at Boulsworth Hill from the road. When the Inquiry Report went to the Minister he ordered the County Council to establish a footpath along the top of the hill. There was plenty of resistance from landowners and it took another twenty two years for a three mile long U shaped permissive (ie no legal right of access) path to the summit to be agreed.

Venue: Old Quarry, Penistone Hill Country Park, Haworth, West Yorkshire - outside Haworth off minor raod between Stanbury and Oxenhope. Followed by four walks of 4 - 7 miles.

255/95: For Immediate Release: 22 September 1995

TAKEOVER MANIA DESCENDING INTO FARCE says PENDLE MP

"The takeover mania in the electricity and water companies is descending into farce" says local MP Gordon Prentice.

"When the Government privatised the electricity and water industries they claimed they would introduce both competition and regulation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Profits have risen, boardroom pay has soared and prices have outpaced inflation. North West Water's bid for Norweb made it crystal clear customers wouldn't benefit this century."

"North West Water's bid for Norweb is worth £1.6 billion. The situation has been complicated by the news that two American Texas based utilities - Central and South West and Houston Industries - and also considering mounting a joint bid for Norweb. Now North West Water has indicated it would be willing to raise its initial offer for Norweb. Yet more money found in its coffers. This proposed merger is crying out to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission."

"When the water companies were privatised the Government wrote off £5 billion of their debt to the taxpayer and also gave them £1.5 billion of taxpayers' money as a green dowry. They then put the industry on the market for £873 million less than its value at the end of the first day's trading. Since then profits have risen by 173% from £641m to £1,748m."

"What happened with electricity was just as bad. When they were sold the net assets in their audited accounts stood at £16,128m. The Government put them on the market at £5,182m. By the end of the first day's trading their share value had risen by 20%. in other words the Government had undervalued them by £1 billion. Since then, profits have risen by 88% - from £994m to £1,866m."

256/95: For Immediate Release: 25 September 1995

MP CHECKS OUT ASDA SHARE OPTIONS

Asda workers in Colne are furious with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clarke. They say the Government is taxing the share options which are being offered this year, for the first time, to all staff from the check-out to the manager's office. They have asked the local MP to take up their case in Parliament.

Almost 40,000 supermarket staff nationwide are entitled to share options in ASDA if they work more than 15 hours a week and have been employed for a year or more. They have the option of buying shares in the company at a favourable price. The company says this increases staff motivation and rewards people who stay with them rather than move on. In July, the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, told Parliament he would be taxing, as income, share options taken out by ASDA people.

Gordon Prentice said: "I met the staff at the Colne supermarket last week and it is clear they feel very fired up about things. I was told they hadn't had a pay rise for three years and now the share options are to be taxed they are absolutely livid. Clearly the people at ASDA are poles apart from the fat cats in the boardroom who have made a fortune out of share options. The company simply believes it is widening share ownership."

"I told the people at ASDA I would be taking their concerns to the Chancellor. We need equity in the tax system. If share options amount to a payment in kind - like a company car or a cut price mortgage - then the tax system has to take account of that fact. We can't have people who get paid in cash or by cheque being disadvantaged compared with people who get benefits in kind but there must be a place in the tax system for companies that want to reward the loyalty of their employees."

Note to Editors: The highest paid director of ASDA received £463,000 in 1993/4. The comparable figure for Sainsbury was £434,000; Marks and Spencer, £689,000 and Tesco, £722,000. The highest paid director in Britain was employed by the Royal Bank of Scotland and received £17,402,000. (Source: House of Commons Employment Committee 24 January 1995) **Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)**

257/95: For Immediate Release: 25 September 1995

MP SLAMS GOVERNMENT OVER "COUNTY CONFUSION"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, told a meeting of the "Unite Craven" pressure group last Friday (22 September) that the Government's handling of the council review has been a disaster from start to finish. The group wanted the MP's views on the restoration of the old Yorkshire county boundary for "ceremonial and related purposes".

The meeting in Earby comes hot on the heels of the controversy ignited by the **"Yorkshire Welcomes You"** sign at the old county boundary near Great Hague Farm between Foulridge and Kelbrook.

The MP said: "People feel a very strong sense of place and identity. I am relaxed about historic boundary signs whether for counties, urban and rural districts or whatever. When I drive along the M62 to Manchester I am always struck by the sign telling me I am entering Greater Manchester County which now, of course, no longer exists!"

"People are concerned first and foremost about their own street, their own neighbourhood. The people I met from Unite Craven clearly have a burning desire to

return to Yorkshire. Some want ceremonial and sporting links. Others want to go the whole hog and want to link up with the Yorkshire District of Craven."

"These people unfortunately have been conned by the Government into believing a new authority straddling the Yorkshire/Lancashire boundary was ever on the cards - or that the county boundary was going to be moved. The fact is there is no power for an area to be separated from its current county for ceremonial functions while remaining within its current county for administrative purposes."

"The Government should have been straight with people from the outset instead of stringing them along with suggestions of possible Ribble Valley/Craven
more follows

link ups from people like David Curry MP. The Government could confront the matter head on by giving a direction to the Local Government Commission to examine the issue."

"The whole thing is a complete dog's breakfast. If Blackburn and Blackpool are given unitary status under the current second stage review of Lancashire, they will be wrenched out of the existing county and made counties in their own right! Imagine the county of Blackpool!"

The MP added: "I live in Barnoldswick and watch Yorkshire Television; pay my water bills to Yorkshire Water and electricity bills to Yorkshire Electricity but I am still very conscious I live in Pendle. Over a whole range of council services we seem to have the edge here on the Lancashire side of the border. That is a powerful reason for the status quo. But better services, in themselves, would not matter if enough people felt so strongly about the border issue that it eclipsed all else in importance. The very low turnout (I think it was about 8%) in the Barnoldswick Town Poll a few years ago shows a limited number of people do feel strongly about the issue - but there are simply not enough of them to persuade the Government to act."

"I have written to the Minister to ask him why he did not at least ask the Commission to examine the option of moving the county boundary. The Unite Craven people are keen to find out."

Note to Editors: The draft report of the Local Government Commission on Lancashire, published in June 1994, had this to say: "The Commission currently does not have the legal power to recommend any cross boundary mergers with parts of North Yorkshire. The Commission presented its final recommendations on North Yorkshire to the Secretary of State in January 1994. The Secretary of State has yet to reach a decision on whether to accept those recommendations. Were a new direction to be issued to review that area then the Commission would be able to consider the case." *(The Minister has opted for the status quo with the exception of an enlarged York)*

"It is possible that pride in the historic county of Yorkshire could be accommodated without the need to recreate the old administrative boundary. The restoration of historic counties for ceremonial, cultural and related purposes can be achieved independently from the structural review, and the Commission is proposing the restoration of the historic counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire."

258/95: For Immediate Release: 25 September 1995

MP TO QUIZ HALIFAX OVER HOUSE PRICE BONUS SCAM

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to quiz Halifax Building Society chiefs this Friday (September 29) about their house price bonus scam which rewarded estate agents who persuaded house sellers to drop the asking price of their property. The building society has now dropped the idea following a public outcry alleging sharp practice.

The MP, who takes a close interest in housing issues, will be meeting the policy makers at their Halifax HQ this week. He said: "Pendle has one of the highest home ownership figures in the entire country and I am very concerned indeed that people trying to get a fair price for their property could have been cheated by Halifax estate agents to sell for less than the best price."

"Halifax say this wheeze was simply a way to get the market moving. I don't buy that at all. If people are persuaded to sell at something less than the best price then they are being cheated by the very people whose whole purpose is to get the best deal possible."

"I shall also be discussing other pressing housing issues with the Halifax - such as repossessions and negative equity. The housing market is stagnant because people are uncertain of the future. It is no wonder houses are not selling when people don't know if they are going to be in work in a year's time - let alone in five years. We need to give people confidence in the future."

Note to Editors: Halifax Property Services was offering prizes to staff of up to £200 if they persuaded clients to cut the price of their property.

259/95: For Immediate Release: 3 October 1995

JOBLESS BARLICKERS WILL STILL HAVE TO PAY TO SIGN ON

Out of work Barlickers who have to travel to the Job Centre in Colne will get no help with their bus fares says Education and Employment Minister, Eric Forth. He says it would be "prohibitively expensive" to reimburse fares to all clients.

The Minister was replying to local MP, Gordon Prentice, who claimed unemployed people in Barnoldswick were being short changed by the Employment Service.

Unemployed people who used to sign on in Barnoldswick before the town's Job Centre was closed now have to go more than five miles away to Colne. The cost of the bus fares amounts to a week's unemployment benefit.

The Minister told the Pendle MP: "None of the clients living in Barnoldswick who "sign on" at the Colne Jobcentre are beyond this limit. I should point out that there are regular bus services involving a journey of between 15 - 20 minutes at a cost of £1.70 return. Therefore, a year's travel costs for our Barnoldswick clients would be £44.20. While I can appreciate that this is a considerable sum to unemployed people, I am sure you will agree that, based on a national unemployment register standing at 2,315,000 (July seasonally adjusted figure), it would be prohibitively expensive to reimburse fares to all our clients."

The MP said: "People have to sign on in person unless they live more than six miles from their nearest Employment Service office when they are allowed to sign on by post. The old Job Centre in Barlick is 5.1 miles from the one in Colne by the most

direct road route. Why on earth can't unemployed people be reimbursed their legitimate travelling costs if the employment office is beyond a reasonable walking distance?"

"The Minister's reply was totally inadequate. I still don't know where this 6 mile limit came from. Someone, somewhere has

More follows

pulled it out of a hat. I have been given a lot of extraneous waffle about the merits of signing on in person. I have never challenged the appropriateness of doing so - only the costs. The matter is not closed."

Note to Editors: The Minister's letter of 27 September reads: "Thank you for your letters of 28 August and 11 September to Gillian Shepherd regarding previous correspondence with The Employment service (ES) about Mr X of X Street, Barnoldswick. I am replying as Minister responsible for the ES.

The Chief Executive of the ES, Mike Fogden, wrote to you on 1 August. He explained that Social Security regulations require our clients to attend the Jobcentre in person on a fortnightly basis to make their claim. However, the ES has a special concession to minimise hardship which allows those living further than six miles away from their nearest Jobcentre to claim by post. The limit is defined as being more than six miles by ordinary road whether or not this is a bus route.

None of the clients living in Barnoldswick who "sign on" at the Colne Job Centre are beyond this limit. I should point out that there are regular bus services involving a journey of between 15 - 20 minutes at a cost of £1.70 return. Therefore, a year's travel costs for our Barnoldswick clients would be £44.20. While I can appreciate that this is a considerable sum to unemployed people, I am sure you will agree that, based on a national unemployment register standing at 2,315,000 (July seasonally adjusted figure), it would be prohibitively expensive top reimburse fares to all our clients.

The ES's key objective is to help clients return to work. Research has shown that the more often we see people the greater the likelihood that we can rapidly achieve this aim. For this reason clients are encouraged to attend the Jobcentre in person wherever possible. Clients attending fortnightly are able to avail themselves of ES full range of services, including access to the latest vacancies on the notice boards.

If Mr X wishes to alter his current signing time to allow him to use the most direct bus route (avoiding Earby and Kelbrook) he should ask to speak to the section manager when he next attends the Jobcentre.

I hope that this helps clarify the situation. Eric Forth MP

260/95: For Immediate Release: 3 October 1995

PENDLE'S HILL FARMERS GET A RAW DEAL SAYS MP

Pendle's hill farmers are struggling to make ends meet according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. Last week, the MP spent a day on Simon Lord's sheep farm outside Littleborough with Pendle hill farmer, Norman Nutter, as his guide.

The MP said: "The National Farmers' Union has been working overtime to draw to the nation's attention the desperate plight of our hill farmers in the so-called "less favoured areas". It is an astonishing fact that over 40% of full time hill and upland farmers in England had an annual farm income in 1993/4 of less than £10,000. The NFU has been pressing for a fair deal from the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HCLA) which will be announced in the November Budget."

"Cuts in the HCLA are causing long term damage to employment in the countryside and to the rural environment. It is paid to some of the poorest farmers in the country to compensate them for the permanent hardships they face in some of the most remote parts of the country. Now our hill farmers are literally scraping a living from the soil."

"Framing in upland areas isn't a doddle. Putting falling incomes to one side, they've got to combat the growing menace of cattle and sheep rustling. Imagine the shock to the system of waking up, as usual, at the crack of dawn only to find someone has fleeced your flock!"

Note to Editors: Last November, Pendle's hill farmers joined others from all over England and Wales in a mass lobby of Parliament to press for a fairer deal. The MP is being invited to the December meeting of the Nelson and Colne Branch of the NFU to spell out the Labour Party's policies for agriculture.

261/95: For Immediate Release: 3 October 1995

MP SLAMS PLANS FOR "GO-IT-ALONE" BLACKBURN AND BLACKPOOL

Plans to wrench Blackburn and Blackpool out of Lancashire County Council and given them unitary status are misconceived says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Last Friday, he told a meeting of the Pendle Labour Party that the proposals announced on 25 September by the Local Government Commission were neither fish nor fowl.

"The new structure will cost extra money to run and has very little going for it. If Blackburn and Blackpool, why not Burnley or Preston or Lancaster or, indeed, Pendle?"

"My own position is well known. I am in favour of unitary authorities responsible for all council services because I believe such a structure brings greater transparency and accountability. But any reform must be considered and coherent, involving the entire county and not just bits of of it."

"In a democracy, people have got to have a very clear idea of who to blame when things go wrong - or who should get the plaudits when things go well. The present system is very opaque. People often don't know who is pulling the levers."

262/95: For Immediate Release: 3 October 1995

MP ENTERS ROW OVER PART-TIME POLICE STATION

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has entered the controversy over plans to cut the opening hours of the police station in Barnoldswick. He says he wants the town's Police Station to be open round the clock.

He said: "Superintendent Rawstrone let me into his thinking some time ago and assured me the proposal would be open for consultation. I made it clear to him then I could not support the plan even though I understand his motivation. With police finances tight, he wants to get his policemen and women out from behind their desks. He wants to see them patrolling the streets. But people will simply not accept the trade-off if it means their police station empty and padlocked."

"A police station is a place of refuge. It has enormous psychological importance and if a town the size of Barlick can't support a police station then what does that tell us about the state of the nation. I know police stations are under threat over in Clitheroe and in Darwen."

"I am in touch with the County's new Chief Constable. I also want to know what the Home Secretary thinks about this."

263/95: For Immediate Release: 3 October 1995

MP RAISES DOUBTS OVER FINANCING OF PENDLE'S NEW AREA COMMITTEES

More work needs to be done to ensure public money spent by Pendle Council's five new area committees is allocated on a fair basis, according to the Borough's MP, Gordon Prentice.

"Anything that brings local government closer to the people is to be welcomed. Folk can't stand red tape and bureaucracy and I am all in favour of moves to tackle the feeling of remoteness which can too easily separate the Council from the people it represents."

The MP continued: "The Council needs to do more work on how the budgets to the five areas are constructed. Their must be full transparency in how public money is spent across the Borough."

"Money is to be dished out according to one of four criteria. The first deals with "area based" activities so the mortuary goes to the Nelson Committee even though it will no doubt draw its clients from across the Borough! The second way in which budgets are to be allocated is by contract specification where borough wide activities can be split up by area. Clearly, people will want to know if specifications which govern matters such as the standard and frequency of work done vary by area. The third criteria uses existing spending patterns but that leaves us with a new structure replicating historic spending patterns. These need to be re-examined."

"The fourth and final way in which public money is to be allocated is by population. This is by far and away the crudest measure and I will want to be assured it will not progressively take over from other measures that look at need as the most rational way of determining priorities."

"Apparently, the tree maintenance budget is to go to the five areas according to the number of people - not the number of trees! Money for tree planting could be allocated on a per head basis but tree maintenance surely depends on where the trees are. There are other matters such as gully cleaning, waste disposal

and social lighting where the budgets are done on a population basis."

"It is an interesting experiment in delivering council services. The sharpest break from past practice seems to be in planning matters and, on the face of it, there could be considerable additional administrative work needed with all the costs that entails. I will want to be reassured on that point."

"The new structure will survive if it works and is seen to be fair. It has to be thought through on the basis of fairness, with priorities properly assessed, with no winners and losers. Public money must be spent in a way that is open and transparent and is not allocated in a way that is capricious."

Note to Editors: In August, the MP said the controversial new Area Committees set up by the Liberal controlled Pendle Council should be put under the microscope. At the time he said he was alarmed by comments in the local press that some people thought the new structure would allow their areas to get "a touch more than their fair share".

264/95: For Immediate Release: 3 October 1995

MP VOWS TO OUTLAW "SALES OF THE CENTURY"

The "sale of the century" at the Great Marsden Hotel in Nelson conned people into believing they were buying high quality goods at knock down prices when all they ended up with was cheap and shoddy rubbish, according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

He said: I feel every sympathy for people who were parted from their hard earned cash by silver tongued con men. The sale was a fraud from start to finish and the people responsible - Table Top Marketing of Cheltenham - are the lowest form of pond life. Their form of selling - here one moment and gone the next - has been perfected into an art form and it is about time they were brought to book."

"When Parliament reassembles later this month, I shall be pressing for tighter laws to clamp down on these unprincipled and despicable traders."

276/95: Embargoed: 24 October 1995

MP TRACKS DOWN “ONE DAY SALE” FRAUDSTER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has launched a blistering attack on the man responsible for running the two infamous “one day sales” in Pendle earlier this month which left a string of people bitter and angry after they had been persuaded to buy shoddy goods.

The MP has tracked down William Beach who is a director of Table Top Marketing. His co-director is Aklieren Mehmet Emin, a Turkish national, of 44 Clement Street, Tredworth, Gloucester. In a Commons motion appearing today the MP describes

Beach as an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat. The MP wants people to take him to the small claims court to get their money back.

The MP said: "People like Beach are nauseating fraudsters who deserve to be exposed for what they are."

Note to Editors: The MP's Early Day Motion reads:
This House utterly condemns the misrepresentation and underhand practices that characterise the "one day sales" put on by William Beach of 30 Pitville Court, Albert Road, Cheltenham, in which members of the public are conned into believing the boxes of goods they are buying unseen contain quality merchandise whereas in reality they are getting cheap and shoddy goods; notes that sales were held at the Great Marsden Hotel, Nelson and at the North Valley Community Centre, Colne in which people were led to believe they were buying bankrupt stock; sympathises with Mrs Lana Ellerton who ended up with two pillows and a clock, and who says people were put under pressure to buy goods they did not really want; regrets that pensioners and others were persuaded to hand over good money for worthless rubbish; further notes that Beach was previously a director of Gloucester Fancy Goods Ltd and J.B. Sales (Gloucester) Ltd, both now dissolved, and is currently a director of Table Top Marketing Ltd and Steve's Cash and Carry; believes that travelling salespeople who do not operate from a permanent retail base should be obliged to give advance notice of one day sales to the relevant Trading Standards Office; calls on the Government to review the law on consumer protection and how it can be more effectively applied; considers that Beach is an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat and urges people who consider themselves to be victims of misrepresentation to seek redress in the small claims court.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

277/95: For Immediate Release: 23 October 1995

MP WANTS BAN ON "VIDEO FOR VOYEURS"

The Home Secretary is being urged to outlaw the sale of videos which use footage from closed circuit TV cameras installed in public places.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, wants to know what Michael Howard is doing to prevent tapes which show members of the public in embarrassing or compromising positions being sold on to commercial organsiations for use in films and videos.

The Pendle MP said: "The person who recently produced the dreadful video of real - as opposed to faked - executions and deaths describing it as an aid to understanding now, apparently, wants to release a video of people caught on camera doing things they would naturally prefer other people not to know about."

"A video showing people having sex in shop doorways - unaware of the spying camera - is simply not on."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

278/95: For Immediate Release: 24 October 1995

ROADS MINISTER SAYS NO TO BY-PASS

Roads Minister, John Watts, says he can make no commitment to the Colne/Foulridge By-pass or to the trunking of the A56. The Minister has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that he was interested in seeing local traffic conditions at first hand on his visit to Pendle but his view remains unchanged.

Prentice said: "This is very disappointing though hardly unexpected. It is simply incredible that the Minister is prepared to wait until the M65/M6 link up is completed before he seriously addresses the problems here in Pendle. He told me on Monday (23 October) that he expects traffic on the M65 to rise by just over 10% - or 4,500 vehicles per day - once the link is built."

"I am afraid this Government is a complete wash out so far as East Lancashire is concerned. While I was pleased John Watts visited us in Pendle we got nothing out of it. I hit the nail on the head when I said he would offer us tea and sympathy and little else."

Note to Editors: Lancashire County Council has the Colne/Foulridge and Kelbrook/Earby By-passes down for consideration in its 1997/8 Transport Policies and Programme submission.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

279/95: For Immediate Release: 24 October 1995

COUNCIL HAS NO IDEA OF COSTS OF RUNNING NEW AREA COMMITTEES

Pendle Council has no idea how much it is going to cost to run the five new area committees which are now up and running. The Liberal controlled council says the new structure will bring decision making closer to the people.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I have to say I am very surprised indeed that the Council's structure should have been turned inside out before any information was available on the likely costs of the upheaval. I am told that estimated costs or projected costs are not available. The whole exercise may be good value for money or it may be money down the drain. Who is to know? It is astonishing that organisational change of this nature can be undertaken with no idea of its likely costs."

In a letter to Pendle's Chief Executive the MP said he had reservations about the way in which the new area committees were to be funded. The MP said there should be no winners and losers in the process and that public money should not be allocated in a capricious way. "Transparency is everything" said the MP.

Note to Editors: Pendle's Chief Executive, Stephen Barnes, told the MP in a letter dated 16 October: "Concerning the query on costs in your final paragraph. I am unable to let you have a note of running costs for the new structure. You should be aware that no new employees costs have arisen through introducing the new structure, indeed existing reductions in manpower caused by the budget difficulties

have been maintained. It will be some 12 to 18 months before a pattern emerges in the allocation of officer time to these area committees, however until then it is not possible for me to give you any projected costs."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

280/95: For Immediate Release: 24 October 1995

"KEEP BUSES LOCAL" says PENDLE MP

Local opinion is running strongly against plans by Pendle's Liberal controlled council to sell its stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport. The MP says he has been engulfed with letters and petitions opposing the sell-off.

Prentice said: "Some local authorities have seen their buses run off the road as a result of the so-called "bus wars" when predators such as Stagecoach drive into town. What happened in Darlington is a legendary case in point. But that isn't the case here in Burnley and Pendle where we have a local bus company we should keep and be proud of."

"Liberal run Eastbourne Council is proud of its bus company - the first municipal bus company in the country. Indeed, its Managing Director, David Howard, told me: *"There is no doubt that generally speaking the ownership of a bus company by a local authority can be seen by the population as being a service provided by local management with appropriate knowledge and identity with the area, who may be more sympathetic to consider service provision than the management of one of the larger bus operating groups remote from the district concerned.""*

"It is about time the Liberal run council here in Pendle took a leaf out of their colleagues book in Eastbourne."

"The Liberals have no right whatsoever to sell our bus company."

Note to Editors: Eastbourne letter enclosed.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

281/95: For Immediate Release: 26 October 1995

HOWARD'S PROBATION PLANS "COULD PUT PUBLIC AT RISK" SAYS MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today attacked the Home Secretary Michael Howard for "putting the public at risk" by ending all training requirements for Probation Officers and offering nothing to replace the present system.

"Probation Officers now deal with offenders who are more difficult, more damaged and more dangerous every year. They need to be properly prepared and properly trained to undertake that work effectively," said the MP.

"Instead of offering a better system of training, Michael Howard has torn up the present system and put nothing in its place. There is a gaping void and the public could be at risk if those who supervise offenders are not fully trained for the job.

"Labour would support changes that would improve standards, as would many in the probation service. But any new system must include a strong element of practical experience, high-level academic content and proper assessment and accreditation. There were 493 responses by organisations and individuals to Michael Howard's bogus 'consultation' exercise with only 11 supporting the Home Secretary's plans.

"Before he scraps the present system, Michael Howard must say what he is going to put in its place."

Note to Editors: In 1994 54,000 people were supervised on Probation Orders in England and Wales and nearly 50,000 Community Service Orders were issued giving over 5 million hours of unpaid work. Probation Officers were also responsible for writing 233,000 pre-sentence reports for the courts and prepared 35,000 family court enquiries.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

282/95: For Immediate Release: 26 October 1995

MP GIVES MINISTER HIS MARCHING ORDERS

The traditional marches and parades which take place each year in Northern Ireland from July until the end of August should routinely be re-routed away from areas where the people living there don't want them says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

In the Commons today, the MP told Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew, that parades going through areas where they are not wanted put in jeopardy the entire peace process.

The MP said: "Too often these parades are triumphalist and provocative and put communities under siege."

"In July we witnessed the disgraceful scenes at Portadown with an inflammatory and blood curling speech from Ian Paisley, demonising Catholics. David Trimble who claimed "no compromise" and "no deal" on the route of the Portadown march was just as bad. Such is the political potency of these confrontational marches, his actions probably won him the leadership of the Ulster Unionists."

"The peace process needs to be nurtured. Marching uninvited through someone else's neighbourhood is not the way to go about it."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

283/95: For Immediate Release: 30 October 1995

TAPS WILL RUN DRY IN THREE WEEKS

Yorkshire Water today announced that taps are likely to run dry in Calderdale and Kirklees in three weeks unless people cut their demand for water. The company wants people in West Yorkshire to reduce their demand for water by a quarter.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency is in part served by Yorkshire Water, said: "The situation is getting desperate for the people in West Yorkshire but the rest of us too should also cut our water consumption. No-one wants to see water being taken from the Wharfe but these are abnormal times and it has to happen."

"Once we get over this crisis the Company will have a lot of explaining to do. I shall want to see some action to plug all those leaky pipes."

Note to Editors: John Layfield, Yorkshire Water's Director of Production told the Pendle MP today: "Since I last wrote to you, the situation concerning water stocks has continued to deteriorate. There has still been no significant rainfall in Yorkshire since March and October has been abnormally dry. Demand from customers continues to be high.

"In the past few weeks, as you are aware, we have made numerous appeals to the public to reduce their water consumption and have supplemented reducing reservoir stocks with additional water from the rivers - and with a massive tankering operation. Consequently, we have been able to stabilise the situation in Bradford and expect, if we are granted the Drought Orders on the Ouse and the Wharfe, to stabilise Leeds to prevent stocks declining further. We will keep both situations closely under review, but are not planning for rota cuts in these areas at the present time.

"However, the situation in Calderdale and Kirklees is very different. It is not technically possible to support these two areas from the rivers in the same way as Bradford and Leeds and, although we have stepped up and will continue to increase our tankering operations, it is impossible to meet all demand in this way.

"Stocks in both areas are reducing and without rain, will fall to unacceptable levels. We face the possibility that in three weeks' time, we may be unable to maintain normal supplies to some customers. Therefore, we have today announced that we are to apply to the Department of Environment for an Emergency Drought Order to grant us the necessary

Yorkshire Water

powers to impose rota cuts in Calderdale and Kirklees if the situation does not improve. More information about our application, which will be lodged on Wednesday, is shown in the attached press release.

"It is vital, if we are to preserve existing water stocks for as long as possible that we succeed in persuading customers to reduce their demand for water. Despite advertising and appeals to the media, there has been little evidence of any significant reduction. We have made further appeals today and I would urge you to join your voice to ours in seeking customers' help in alleviating the situation. The over-riding need is to persuade people to save water."

Note 2 to Editors: In August the Pendle MP slammed Yorkshire Water for making enormous profits while water leaks away.

Yorkshire Water	Profits 94/5	Profits per minute	Water leaked per minute (gallons)	Daily leakage from company pipes (gallons)	No of persons whose needs could be met by water leaked
	£142m	£270	72,107	103,834,140	3,687,734

Yrkshre Water	Daily leakage from company pipes (gallons)	leakage from company pipes as % of total leakage	Daily leakage from customer pipes (gallons)	Leakage from customer pipes as a % of total leakage	Total daily leakage (gallons)	Leakage from company pipes as a % of total daily water dis-tributed
	103.8 million gallons	87%	16 million gallons	13%	119.8 million gallons	32%

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

284/95: For Immediate Release: 31 October 1995

NEW DRIVERS SHOULD BE ON PROBATION says MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, wants people who have just passed their driving test to display green "probationary" learner plates on their car for six months afterwards. The MP says this will do wonders for road safety.

Twice in the last fortnight the MP says he has witnessed "appallingly bad" driving. "I see people physically behind the wheel but who are mentally miles away - day dreaming about something or other and perfectly oblivious to what is happening on the road in front of them."

"There are people on the road who have taken countless driving tests before eventually passing and it would be in their interests as well as the rest of us if we had the green plates introduced. The Driving Standards Agency has told me that four out of every hundred people passed the driving test at their sixth or subsequent attempt. I am happy for them but what about the rest of us on the road? The sight of a green plate would make us all drive more carefully. It is not just the new drivers we need to worry about."

Note to Editors: The Chief Executive of the Driving Standards Agency, Bernard Herdan, told the Pendle MP on 27 October that in a random sample of 1,187 people who had recently taken their driving test, 837 (71%) had just passed and of these passes 252 (30%) were at the first attempt; 280 (33%) at the second; 158 (19%) at the

third; 86 (10%) at the fourth; 25 (3%) at the fifth and 35 (4%) at the sixth or subsequent attempt.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

285/95: For Immediate Release: 31 October 1995

MINISTERS WASH THEIR HANDS OF POLICE STATION CLOSURES

Home Office Minister, David Maclean, has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that he does not intend to get embroiled in the controversy over the opening hours of Barnoldswick Police Station. In a letter to the MP, the Minister says it is an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

Prentice said: "This is typical of the Pontius Pilate approach to politics. Here we have the Government, yet again, separating policy from operational matters - and refusing to give a view!"

"I have asked the Minister to look again at the way in which the amount of money that goes to the police from central government - the Police Grant - is calculated. It is worked out on a formula which includes a multiplicity of factors some of which are hardly likely to benefit East Lancashire. The grant takes into account the number of households renting yet we have one of the highest levels of home ownership in the country."

"Why can't Ministers come clean on this issue instead of knocking the ball back into the Chief Constable's court?"

Note to Editors: Letter from David Maclean, dated 27 October, attached.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

286/95: For Immediate Release: 31 October 1995

CABLING WEST CRAVEN

The information superhighway is passing West Craven by according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. Elsewhere in Pendle roads and pavements are being dug up by the cable giant, Nynex, but West Craven has been left untouched.

The MP said: "In one sense, people who live in West Craven can count themselves lucky that their neighbourhoods are not being turned into something from the Battle of the Somme with trenches and excavations everywhere. But there is a downside too. We could be missing out on the new information age."

"I am in touch with the Independent Television Commission who are responsible for awarding franchises for local areas. I also want to know from Nynex if they have considered extending their franchise area into West Craven. If not, there is always the possibility of a new local delivery licence going to someone else."

Note to Editors: Before the Broadcasting Act 1990, the Cable Authority specified an area to be covered, and it was a condition of the licence that a certain proportion of premises would be passed. The Cable Authority was abolished by the 1990 Act, and its functions taken over by the Independent Television Commission. The framework provided in the Act for the technology neutral local delivery services is designed to permit operators to choose the nature and level of service they wish to offer the public. In response to expressions of interests from particular localities, the ITC draw up a map extending over a fairly wide area, not already covered by a cable franchise, which they intend to advertise. An applicant must then identify which parts the system will serve and if successful will be licensed to meet this commitment. There is no requirement to go beyond what is economically viable. The process is set out in the ITC's Annual Report.

Applicants may put forward proposals to provide, within those parts of the advertised area they themselves specify, a local delivery service by cable, or microwave transmissions in the 40.5-42.5 GHz band, or any combination of cable and microwave. The ITC must be satisfied that the technical system is acceptable to the telecommunications licensing authorities at Oftel, the DTI and Radiocommunications Agency and that the applicant would be in a position to maintain the service throughout the licensed period. The licence will then be awarded to the highest such bidder unless there are 'exceptional circumstances' which justify its award to a lower bidder, such as a proposal to serve a substantially greater proportion of the area that was advertised. **Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249**

287/95: For Immediate Release: 31 October 1995

EX BUS CHIEF ENTERS SELL-OFF ROW

The former General Manager of Burnley and Pendle Buses, Roy Marshall, has stepped into the row over the planned sale of the bus company by the Liberal controlled Pendle Council. Mr Marshall, who ran the company for 12 years from 1974 until his retirement in 1986 says the sale will be detrimental to the employees and to local taxpayers.

Mr Marshall's criticisms of the proposed sale are set out in a letter to Pendle's Chief Executive which was copied to Burnley Council and the two local MPs.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "These criticisms come from a man who knows his onions having been involved in transport, one way or another, man and boy. He says a takeover by Stagecoach or one of the other private operators could mean cuts in staffing levels and wages, closure of depots and workshops and cutting routes and services that don't bring in enough income."

"This is further evidence - if any more is required - that should make Pendle Council pause to think again. The plain fact is the bus company is not theirs to sell without making it explicitly clear to the electorate beforehand."

Note to Editors: Mr Marshall's letter enclosed

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

288/95: For Immediate Release: 1 November 1995

TV CAMPAIGN GETS SWITCHED OFF

The long running campaign by local MP, Gordon Prentice, to get North West television beamed into West Craven seems to be faltering. The MP says the proposed introduction of digital terrestrial broadcasting (DTB) has unexpectedly "thrown a spanner in the works".

Last month the MP wrote to Pendle Council asking if it would be prepared to help finance a technical survey costing £5,000. The solution - costing as little as a further £5,000 - would have given people in West Craven the choice between watching North West TV or Yorkshire. At the time he said these were small sums of money given the number of people likely to benefit.

"Digital broadcasting - bringing up to 20 additional TV channels in place of the four we have at the moment - is going to be given the go ahead by Parliament in this coming session and it will probably be with us in 1997/8. Unfortunately, I have now been told by the Independent Television Commission that digital TV will involve complex frequency planning and they will have to look at relays, repeaters and transmitters. Put simply, it puts a brake on my efforts to give people in West Craven a choice now of whether to tune into Yorkshire or to watch Granada and BBC North West because the solution would be likely to involve a relay."

"My campaign is being overtaken by the new technology. In West Craven in a few years time it will be possible to press a button and get the station of your choice - and the sooner the better. In this day and age it is simply astonishing that people who live in West Craven and who want to follow events in the North West cannot pick up news about the region on their TV sets."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

289/95: For Immediate Release: 1 November 1995

Granada TV "THE LINE"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on Granada Television's new political programme **"The Line"** on Thursday 9 November.

He will be reviewing the Guardian's political coverage with the Conservative MP for Macclesfield, Nicholas Winterton.

"The Line" is transmitted at 11.10pm.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

290/95: For Immediate Release: 2 November 1995

MP CALLS FOR FULL DISCLOSURE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called for full implementation of the Nolan report to force MPs to disclose their outside earnings which arise from directly from their membership of the House of Commons. The debate on the Nolan recommendations is to take place in the Commons on Monday.

The MP said: "This Government is steeped in sleaze. Money from Greek tycoons; Asil Nadir; cash for questions; John Gummer's free pond worth £2,00O; Alan Duncan buying his neighbour's council house a stone's throw from Westminster; Gyles Brandreth, the Chester Tory MP, whose failed firm received a grant of £200,000 from the English Tourist Board. Malcolm Thornton MP paid consultant to North West Water but he won't tell the public what he gets paid and what he does for the company. And so it goes on and on. It is a catalogue of sleaze and sharp practice enough to make any reasonable person choke."

"On the day of the publication of the Nolan Committee's report (11 May 1995) I asked the Prime Minister in the Commons if he would take personal responsibility for his sleazy MPs. As usual he ducked and dived and bobbed and weaved, refusing to give a straight answer. Now (1 November) he has says he will let things continue as they are on non-disclosure but that is simply not on."

"What have Tory MPs got to hide - except what they make on the side."

Note to Editors: On 11 May 1995 the Pendle MP asked the PM: "Today, with the publication of the Nolan report, will the Prime Minister take full personal responsibility for the tide of sleaze that has engulfed his Government. Will he now admit it is quite wrong for Ministers to move seamlessly from the Cabinet Room to the boardroom, lining their pockets in the process? The Prime Minister replied: "I invite the hon gentleman to read the report before he comments on it. He will then see what Lord Nolan has to say about the great majority of men and women in British public life, their standards and their ethics, and he may just regret the way in which he and some of his hon friends have attempted, time after time, to issue general smears about specific matters.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

291/95: For Immediate Release: 7 November 1995

GOVERNMENT SAYS WEST CRAVEN CANNOT BE IN YORKSHIRE FOR CEREMONIAL PURPOSES

The Government has confirmed it is impossible for West Craven to be treated as part of Yorkshire for ceremonial purposes while remaining for administrative purposes within the county of Lancashire.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This is precisely what I told the Unite Craven people when I spoke at their meeting in Earby on 22 September. The Government has led people up the garden path by appointing a Local Government Commission universally famed for its incompetence. The advice it gave was simply wrong and the Review itself was badly handled from start to finish."

"The Commission should have done the Yorkshire and Lancashire reviews in tandem, specifically inviting representations from Pendle and Craven councils on the West

Craven issue. The arguments would then have been out in the open and would have been resolved one way or the other."

Note to Editors: Local Government Minister, Sir Paul Beresford wrote to the Pendle MP on 30 October as follows: "Thank you for your letter of 27 September to John Gummer on behalf of the "Unite Craven" pressure group who seek the return of West Craven to North Yorkshire.

As you know, our view is that the relevant legislation does not permit changes to be made to the ceremonial arrangements of counties other than as consequence of structural or boundary changes. The Local Government Commission did not recommend either structural or boundary changes in Lancashire, and the Secretary of State cannot therefore make changes to the ceremonial arrangements in the county.

The Local Government Commission's comments at paragraph 130 of its draft report on Lancashire were wrong and that is why they were not included in its final report.

The Commission was only free to examine cross boundary solutions where authorities were in the same review area. The procedural guidance we gave to the Commission for the shire area reviews did, however, make clear that

West Craven

where authorities were not in the same review area, which was the case for Lancashire and North Yorkshire - and the Commission judged it necessary
to make recommendations concerning an area on the border between the two - it could ask the Secretary of State to vary the direction it had received. No such request was received, and the directions were not varied.

We will be considering the Commission's future work programme in the early New Year, once it has finished the further district reviews which it has been directed to undertake. At that stage we will take into account the various requests which have been put to us for further boundary reviews, including a review of the boundary between Lancashire and North Yorkshire."

Note 2 to Editors: The Government gave procedure guidance to The Local Government Commission in July 1992 concerning the possible creation of new unitary authorities which straddle the Local Government Review Areas - for example, the Yorkshire/Lancashire border. The guidance provides that

> *where the Commission judges it necessary, at any stage of the review, to make recommendations concerning localities bordering on that area, it should make a formal request to the Secretary of State, with reasons, for a variation in the direction requiring the review to be conducted.*

At no stage did the Local Government Commission request a variation in the Secretary of State's direction on the North Yorkshire Review to include the West Craven area of Lancashire.

On 30 June 1993, Local Government Minister, David Curry, told the Commons that there was a move to return West Craven to Yorkshire and that it was up to people there to express what they wanted from the review. Yet the review was being conducted in separate county based areas and on different timetables.

The Local Government Commission's review of North Yorkshire was published on 24 January 1994. The Skipton and Ripon MP, David Curry, provoked an outcry in

November 1993 when he publicly urged people in the Craven District of North Yorkshire to lobby the Commission for a link up with Ribble Valley across the border in Lancashire saying their respective County identities would not suffer.

The Commission proposed that North Yorkshire County Council should disappear and Craven Council should become part of a giant new authority stretching down to Lincolnshire. The Commission's report to the Secretary of State *"recognises that Craven, alone among North Yorkshire Districts, has a majority wishing to keep the present arrangements. However, people in the area identified more strongly with Yorkshire and the Ridings than with the district council area and there was inadequate support for it to become a unitary authority - which in any event at 50,000 population would be very small."*

The draft report of the Local Government Commission on **Lancashire,** published in June 1994, had this to say: *"The Commission currently does not have the legal power to recommend any cross boundary mergers with parts*

West Craven

of North Yorkshire. The Commission presented its final recommendations on North Yorkshire to the Secretary of State in January 1994. The Secretary of State has yet to reach a decision on whether to accept those recommendations. Were a new direction to be issued to review that area then the Commission would be able to consider the case."

"It is possible that pride in the historic county of Yorkshire could be accommodated without the need to recreate the old administrative boundary. The restoration of historic counties for ceremonial, cultural and related purposes can be achieved independently from the structural review, and the Commission is proposing the restoration of the historic counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

292/95: For Immediate Release: 2 November 1995

MP "DISMAYED" AT BAIRDTEX CLOSURE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says he is shocked and dismayed at the news today of the closure of the Trawden based textile firm Bairdtex. The shut down in January will mean the loss of 130 jobs.

Bairdtex is part of the holding company "Baird Textile Holdings Limited" which is itself part of the William Baird Group - a leading clothing supplier to Marks and Spencer and others. In March this year, the Group increased its dividend payment for the first time in three years when it announced 1994 pre-tax profits up 28% from £19.6m to £25.1m.

"In September the Group announced a downturn in profits but I notice that sales of textiles were up from £233m to £299m. The Group also bought a Swedish clothing group and a lingerie operation. I need to know why the woven fabric side of the business is expected to fold when the Group as a whole is growing."

The MP said: “The news comes as a body blow to Trawden and to the whole area and I shall be seeking an early meeting with the company to discuss the factors which led to the announcement and to see what, if anything, can be done to retrieve the situation.”

“Given I have just heard the news, I have no figures to hand about Bairdtex but I know its parent “Baird Textile Holdings” seems to be doing as well as most others in this sector. From 1993 to 1994 its profit on capital employed and on sales went up - as did the profit per employee and sales per employee. I want to know why it is apparently impossible to carry the Bairdtex part of the Baird Group while looking urgently at ways of strengthening the woven fabric operation in Trawden.”

Note to Editors: The following notice appeared at the factory today:
“The William Baird Group regrets to announce its intention to close the Bairdtex Colour Woven Fabric business which is based in Trawden. The

Bairdtex Closure

Colour Woven Fabric industry has become increasingly competitive and
lower cost producers based outside the UK now supply the market at prices which are well below the level which could be sustained by a UK producer

We recognise the outstanding effort which has been made by everyone at Bairdtex to survive within this competitive industry, but regrettably market forces are such that the business is no longer viable. We extremely regret that this action has become necessary but we must now enter into consultation with the Unions regarding the intended closure. We expect
everyone to work through their notice period with the factory closing at the end of January 1996. From next week we shall be talking to everyone on an individual basis and will supply details of redundancy entitlement in writing.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

293/95: For Immediate Release: 2 November 1995

MP SLAMS AGRICULTURAL FRAUD

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily with Agriculture Minister Tony Baldry in the Commons today over the soaring cost of fraud in the Common Agricultural Policy.

The MP claims fraud accounts for an estimated £6 billion out of the CAP budget of £33 billion and that the European Commission admits that the tide of fraud is still rising. “The CAP is a rogue’s gallery, people fiddling fortunes at the expense of the rest of us. The average family in Britain spends £20 more than it needs to because of the existence of the CAP.”

“The Government is at last turning its attention to this scandal and that is welcome but what on earth have Ministers being doing for the past 16 years during which time spending on the CAP has shot up by a staggering 43%.”

The MP told the Minister the Common Agricultural Policy was infested with fraudsters ripping off the rest of us. He said the Government had done too little, too late.

Speaking afterwards, Prentice said: “With enlargement there is the possibility of 8 million more farmers entering the European Union. The cost of the CAP will become unsustainable. There are a million and one other and better ways of spending the billions we pour into agricultural support across Europe.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

294/95: For Immediate Release: 2 November 1995

POLICE BID FOR A CHARTER MARK

News that the Lancashire Constabulary has applied for a Charter Mark has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

In the wake of the controversy over the proposed reduction in opening hours of the Police Station at Barnoldswick the Pendle MP asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he had made of performance against the standards set out in the Citizen’s Charter of the Lancashire Constabulary.

The Minister, John Horam, told the MP today: “Assessment involves evaluation against all six Citizen’s Charter Principles plus three more: user satisfaction, measurable improvements in the quality of service, and innovative enhancements to services at no extra cost.”

Prentice commented: “The Home Secretary has told me he is not prepared even to express a view on the Barnoldswick Police Station business saying it is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. I simply hope our local police listen to local opinion before they implement any drastic changes. To do such a thing would sit uneasily with their own Charter.”

An announcement on the successful organisations will be made next month.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

295/95: For Immediate Release: 2 November 1995

not used

296/95: For Immediate Release: 7 November 1995

MP HAILS NOLAN VOTE

The result of last night’s Commons vote on MP’s outside interests has been hailed by local MP, Gordon Prentice, as a triumph for openness and democracy. He said sleaze had enveloped the Houses of Parliament “as completely and as comprehensively as the London fog of old.”

Speaking after the vote the MP said: “MPs who get paid for consultancies which derive directly from their membership of the Commons will have to come clean - and not before time.”

“At long last the veil will begin to lift over the business relationship between North West Water - which serves most of Pendle - and its “Parliamentary Consultant”, the Conservative MP for Crosby, Sir Malcolm Thornton.”

“In July 1994 I asked the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, what Sir Malcolm did for his money. I was told “it would be a breach of commercial confidence to disclose the arrangements the company has with any third party”. I asked Sir Malcolm. He refused to say.”

“Now, North West Water is to merge with the electricity company Norweb to form the giant United Utilities with the go-ahead being given by the President of the Board of Trade without a referral first to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.”

“What role did the Parliamentary Consultant play in all this? What advice did he offer? What was it worth? My constituents want to know. They will be paying through the nose in due course.”

your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

297/95: For Immediate Release: 7 November 1995

MP CALLS FOR FAIR DEAL FOR PENDLE’S HILL FARMERS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for a fair deal for hill farmers in this month’s Budget. He says Pendle’s hill farmers are struggling to make ends meet.

He said: “In 1992, the Government cut Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances for the first time. In the 1993 Budget, HLCAs were cut again. In that year the government also cut grants for fencing, hedging, dry stone walling and building repairs from 50% to 30% in Less Favoured Areas.”

“Farming unions throughout the country have mounted a campaign this year to urge the government to use the Budget to restore the cuts it has made to the HLCAs. I support them.”

“We bitterly opposed the cuts made to HLCA rates and forced a debate and vote on the floor of the House. The lack of confidence in government policy is discouraging the younger generation from entering hill farming. In Pendle, as elsewhere, a “young” farmer is pushing 50!”

Note to Editor’s: Labour's 1946 Hill Farming Act was described as a 'Charter for Hill Farming'. It made provision for the payment of.hill sheep and hill cattle subsidies. It also made capital grants available for farm buildings, roads, fencing and land improvements.

The need for hill farming support was recognised in the negotiations which preceded Britain's entry into the European Union. In 1975 the EC agreed a Council Directive allowing Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances (HLCAs) to be paid in Less Favoured Areas.

Hill farmers cannot be expected to compete on equal terms with their lowland counterparts. Hill farming sustains the economy and the environment in some of the most scenic parts of Britain. Hill farm incomes reached deplorably low levels in the 1980's and have not yet returned to satisfactory levels. Many of our hill farmers currently work long hours for a net income below the statutory minimum for a shepherd.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

298/95: For Immediate Release: 15 November 1995

A BANDAGE WRAPPED IN RED TAPE

Brierfield's major employer, Smith and Nephew, has developed a new bandage which will give relief to the 400,000 people nationwide who suffer from leg ulcers. But local MP, Gordon Prentice, who visited the Brierfield complex last week, says the Government is holding the company back from selling its revolutionary new bandage to the NHS.

The MP said: "Here in Pendle, Smith and Nephew estimate that over 850 people suffer from leg ulcers, and of those over 200 have open ulcers. It is a dreadful condition and the company has developed a new four layer bandage that helps the healing process and stays on longer without needing to be changed."

"This is good for the person who has to cope with a leg ulcer and it saves money in nursing time and dressing materials. According to Professor Bosanquet from London's Charing Cross Hospital the new bandage could save the NHS a colossal £250m a year."

"Incredibly there is a stand-off between the Department of Health and the Health Authorities who operate at local level. Both sides point to the savings the other is likely to make and say buying the bandages is the other's responsibility! So nothing is happening."

"This is an absurd situation which is clearly damaging the people who need the bandages but it is also holding back one of the biggest employers in Pendle. I shall be meeting people from the company and clinicians at the Commons in December to consider where we go from here. We have to cut through this red tape."

Note to Editors: Bandages and dressings have been available via prescription since the formation of the NHS. The Government says Health Authorities can buy their own bandages from within their own budgets. The Health Authorities say they can't do it because nursing time savings (in changing bandages etc) do not release cash and, in any event, they cannot transfer money out of the prescription budget into another budget.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

299/95: For Immediate Release: 14 November 1995

LIBERAL BUS SALE IS A "MAD DASH FOR CASH" SAYS MP

The planned sale of the local bus company by Pendle's Liberal controlled council has been dubbed a "mad dash for cash" by the area's MP, Gordon Prentice.

He says the Government is rewriting the rules to encourage councils like Liberal controlled Pendle "to flog off the family silver" by saying they can keep more of the cash raised to spend on new projects rather than pay off old debts. At present, the Government forces councils to use a proportion of the money realised from the sale of assets to pay off old council debts.

The MP said: "If councils put their bus companies under the hammer by the end of March next year they will be able to keep more of the proceeds. Under the new rules applying until next March, Pendle council will have to use 25% of what they get from the planned sale to pay off some of the council's outstanding debt leaving 75% available to spend on whatever takes their fancy."

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The Government has slapped a deadline on deals and Pendle Council has fallen for it, hook, line and sinker. The Liberals are so desperate to sell their stake in our bus company by next March they'll accept almost any offer that's made. They don't give a fig for the people who use the buses - or for those who work for our bus company."

"Our local bus company turns in a very good profit to Pendle and Burnley councils every year and the only reason the Liberals want to sell is because they can't balance the books at the Town Hall. At the local elections earlier this year they promised the earth and they have delivered dust. They have no mandate from the people to sell our bus company. What will they do next? Sell our graveyards?"

ends

Note to Editors follows

The Mad Dash for Cash

Note to Editors: At present, local authorities can normally spend on purposes other than debt repayment 25% of capital receipts from the sale of housing assets and 50% of receipts from disposal of other assets. The Government introduced temporary relaxations earlier this year which means local authorities can now spend on new projects increased proportions of receipts from the sale of certain types of assets. These are:

Bus companies (eg Burnley and Pendle)	75% from 1 April 95 to 31 March 96
Airport companies (eg Manchester)	75% from 1 April 95 to 31 March 97
Car Parks	90% from 1 Sept 95 to 31 August 96
Shops	90% from 1 Sept 95 to 31 August 96
Crematoria	90% from 1 Jan 96 to 30 June 1997

In addition the Government intends to make regulations with the effect that for two years from 1 April 1996 authorities should be able to spend 90% of receipts from the sale of county farms and 75% from the sale of education assets.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

300/95: For Immediate Release: 13 November 1995

MP TO MEET BAIRDTEX IN BID TO STOP CLOSURE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet the Managing Director of the Trawden company "Bairdtex", Mr K. H. Patton, on Friday (17 November) in a bid to stave off 129 redundancies and save the troubled textile firm from closure in January.

The MP said: "The closure bombshell was dropped on Pendle a fortnight ago when the company said the decision was forced on them because of lower cost producers outside the UK. This is one of the things I need to talk to the management about. The Group as a whole is doing quite well when compared with others in the same industrial sector and I want to know why it is apparently impossible to keep the Bairdtex operation going while addressing the problems which allegedly exist."

"The plain fact is Trawden cannot afford to lose these jobs and I shall be moving heaven and earth to save them."

Note to Editors: Bairdtex is part of the holding company "Baird Textile Holdings Limited" which is itself part of the William Baird Group - a leading clothing supplier to Marks and Spencer and others. In March this year, the Group increased its dividend payment for the first time in three years when it announced 1994 pre-tax profits up 28% from £19.6m to £25.1m

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

301/95: For Immediate Release: 14 November 1995

MP WELCOMES WATER INVESTIGATION

The investigation by the water watchdog, OFWAT, into the failures of North West Water and Yorkshire water was hailed today by local MP, Gordon Prentice, as a "long overdue breakthrough."

The MP said: "The regulator is supposed to be on the side of the customer yet the water companies seem to be able to cock a snook at the public, impervious to criticism. I want to see Ian Byatt, the Director General of the Office of Water Services, take a tough no nonsense approach with these privatised monopolies."

OFWAT wants to look into a series of failures including leakage from pipes and allegedly contaminated water.

"Here in Pendle, North West Water is making £540 profit every minute of the day. Every minute they are allowing 109,834,140 gallons of water to leak from their pipes. The water they are wasting could meet the needs of 5,528,077 customers. Leakage from North West Water pipes amounts to 82% of the total leakage. For Yorkshire the figure is 87%.

"Here in Britain it never rains but it pours and yet we are told there is still not enough water to go round. The whole thing is absurd. We are paying through the nose for an appalling service."

Note to Editors: Statistics for North West Water and Yorkshire Water.

Company	Profits 94/5	Profits per minute	Water leaked per minute (gallons)	Daily leakage from company pipes (gallons)	No of persons whose needs could be met by water leaked
North West Water	£284m	£540	109,781	158,084,035	5,528,077
Yorkshire Water	£142m	£270	72,107	103,834,140	3,687,734

more follows

OFWAT Investigation

Company	Daily leakage from company pipes (gallons)	leakage from company pipes as % of total leakage	Daily leakage from customer pipes (gallons)	Leakage from customer pipes as a % of total leakage	Total daily leakage (gallons)	Leakage from company pipes as a % of total daily water dis-tributed
North West Water	158 million gallons	82%	34.7 million gallons	18%	192.8 million gallons	30%
Yrkshire Water	103.8 million gallons	87%	16 million gallons	13%	119.8 million gallons	32%

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

302/95: For Immediate Release: 14 November 1995

51 JOBCENTRES CLOSE YET THERE IS NOWHERE CLOSEBY TO SIGN ON

"On yer bike!" is the Government's message to the unemployed if figures unearthed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, are to be believed.

The MP says 51 Jobcentres have closed since 1990 - which includes the one in Barnoldswick - where the nearest alternative office was more than five miles away. Twenty of those were only open part-time.

The MP commented: "This is the Government that famously said unemployment was "a price well worth paying". They are sticking the knife in by making it more and more difficult for people who are out of work by closing Jobcentres where there is no alternative office nearby for signing on."

Note to Editors: In September, Education and Employment Minister Eric Forth told the Pendle MP that out of work Barlickers who have to travel to the Job Centre in Colne will get no help with their bus fares. He said it would be "prohibitively expensive" to reimburse fares to all clients.

Unemployed people who used to sign on in Barnoldswick before the town's Job Centre was closed now have to go more than five miles away to Colne. The cost of the bus fares amounts to a week's unemployment benefit.

The Minister told the Pendle MP: "None of the clients living in Barnoldswick who "sign on" at the Colne Jobcentre are beyond this limit. I should point out that there are regular bus services involving a journey of between 15 - 20 minutes at a cost of £1.70 return."

The Pendle MP has called for unemployed people to have their legitimate travelling costs reimbursed if the employment office is beyond a reasonable walking distance.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

303/95: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1995

PENDLE JOBLESS LOWEST SINCE MAJOR BECAME PRIME MINISTER

Last month, 1,916 people in Pendle were out of work and claiming benefit - the lowest total since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990 when the figure stood at 1,708.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “We are close to getting back to where we started from after five long years during which time unemployment in Pendle peaked at 3,355 in August 1992 - just after a General Election which John Major won on the promise of economic recovery. Unfortunately, there is a dark cloud on the horizon with the recent announcement of the 129 Bairdtex redundancies due in January. I have a meeting tomorrow with the company managment to discuss this.”

“The cost of unemployment in Pendle since John Major became Prime Minister (using the Treasury’s own figures and methodology) is now a staggering £123,522,000.”

In Pendle last month 1,507 men (7.1%) and 409 (2.6%) were out of work and claiming benefit. There were 186 vacancies at the Jobcentre in Colne and 236 at Nelson.

Note to Editors: The seasonally adjusted level of claimant unemployment in the North West rose by 1,200 to 245,600 in October, 8.4% of the workforce.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

304/95: For Immediate Release: 14 November 1995

MP SPEAKS OUT ON CEMFUEL

The burning of the controversial new fuel "Cemfuel" by Castle Cement in Clitheroe is the subject of a public meeting this Friday at Colne Library. The meeting - organised by Pendle Friends of the Earth - starts at 7.30pm and local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be speaking.

The MP said: "I want a full survey done of possible health effects of burning this stuff. Unfortunately, the Government has refused to commission the health studies that are needed if people are to feel reassured that cemfuel is safe."

Note to Editors: In February 1995, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. The consultation period ended on 29 March. In June, the House of Commons Environment Committee published a report making specific recommendations which included one calling on the Government to carry out a thorough survey of human and animal health in the vicinity of cement kilns (both those burning Secondary Liquid Fuel - such as cemfuel- and those burning only coal) in order to establish or disprove the alleged links between kiln pollution and health effects. The Government has yet to reply to the Select Committee's recommendations.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

305/95: For Immediate Release: 15 November 1995

GUTTER POLITICS AT ITS WORST says PENDLE MP

Today's Queen's Speech, opening the new session of Parliament, offers nothing to the country except an unwelcome dose of Conservative electioneering.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Bills are being brought before Parliament with the sole intention of wrong footing the Opposition in the run up to the General Election. Forget about what the country needs. The Government wants to paint the Labour Party as soft of crime, soft on fraud, soft on illegal immigration - and soft in the head. We are no going to co-operate in giving any credence to this absurd caricature."

"The Conservatives will stop at nothing to get re-elected - even if it means inventing stories about the Labour Party and running the same kind of scare stories they used in April 1992."

"The race card is being played without shame. We have already had one Asylum and Immigration Act already in this Parliament and now they are to bring forward

another with chilling tales of thousands of asylum seekers hammering at the nation's gates."

"We want a bi-partisan approach on this issue with a Committee in Parliament set up to take evidence in public as a prior step to legislation. I am fed up with asylum and immigration being used by the Tories in this crude and cynical way."

"We have it on the authority of the former Director of Research at Conservative Central Office - now selected as Tory candidate for the next elction - that the race issue "played very well" in 1992 and in the European elections in 1994 especially with the tabloids. This really is gutter politics at its worst. How much lower can they get? The sewer perhaps."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

306/95: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1995

MP URGES BIDS FOR MILLENNIUM CASH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says organisations in North East Lancashire have only a few weeks left to put in bids for Millennium cash. The deadline for second round proposals ends on 11 December.

The MP quizzed Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, on where the cash was going - and where the bids were coming from. The Minister told the Pendle MP she has received over 200 proposals so far in the latest bidding round with more applications coming in by the day.

Prentice said: “Love it or loathe it, the Lottery is with us and is generating a tidal wave of cash which is washing over some areas of the country and leaving other areas high and dry.”

“Here in Lancashire, there were 12 proposals for millennium cash in the first round which puts us in the middle of the league table of English Counties.”

“People should put their thinking caps on. There are plenty of things that need to be done and the Millennium Commission is looking for organisations with bright ideas.”

“If we don’t bid we can’t complain if the money goes elsewhere.”

Note to Editors: The Millennium Commission was established in February 1994 under the National Lottery etc Act 1993. Its role is to distribute one fifth of the net proceeds of the Lottery to projects “to mark the year 2,000 and the beginning of the third millenium. The table below shows the number of proposals received at the end of the first bidding round in April of this year.

In the first round, awards were offered of up to £50m each for around twelve national landmark projects and smaller awards of £100,000 and regional schemes.

Table follows overleaf...

County	Proposals received during the first bidding round
Bedfordshire	4
Northamptonshre	5
Wiltshire	5
Northumberland	6
Buckinghamshire	7
Cumbria	7
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Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

307/95: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1995

MP SEEKS EARLY DEBATE ON TEXTILES CRISIS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing the Government to make time for an early debate on textiles following the shock announcement earlier this month that Bairdtex, the Trawden based woven fabric maker, is to close in January with the loss of 129 jobs.

In the Commons today, the Pendle MP told the Government's business manager, the Leader of the House, Tony Newton, that the skills and commitment of the people at Bairdtex deserved better than this - the closure of the firm to which many of them had loyally given their working lives. He told the Minister Bairdtex was part of a group whose customers included such blue chip companies as Marks and Spencer.

Tony Newton promised he would refer the MP's request to the President of the Board of Trade, Ian Lang.

Mr Prentice is to meet the company management tomorrow (Friday) to discuss the closure.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

308/95: For Immediate Release: 16 November 1995

BBC NORTHWESTMINSTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on BBC Television's regional political programme **"Northwestminster"** this Sunday, 19 November.

He will be discussing the Queen's Speech and its implications with with the Conservative MP for Congleton, Ann Winterton.

"Northwestminster" goes out at 1.30pm.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

309/95: For Immediate Release: 20 November 1995

BAIRDTEX

The crisis meeting last Friday between the top management of Bairdtex and local MP, Gordon Prentice, ended with no sign the closure threat would be lifted.

The Pendle MP, who pressed for a stay of execution for the troubled Trawden firm, said afterwards that hopes of a reprieve were fading.

“The Managing Director, Ken Patton, and the other senior people in the company told me the decision had been made after exploring all the alternatives and there was no going back on it. They told me there was no other buyer in prospect for the firm and they simply could not compete with overseas producers. They took the view there was no action I could press upon the British Government or, indeed, the European Union which would help the situation and force a re-think. It is profoundly depressing news.”

“The management is convinced that even with investment in state-of-the-art textile machinery it wouldn’t be enough to turn things round. But, having heard the detailed explanation from the company, I still find it astonishing that the company cannot retain the Trawden operation within a growing and profitable Group which is so closely integrated with the retail market through the High Street giant Marks & Spencer. In future, the Baird Group will be buying its woven fabric from overseas producers.”

“I am in touch with the GMB - the union which represents the people at Bairdtex - to see how best we can take things forward. I also have a meeting planned with the British Apparel Federation on 29 November and I shall be raising the issue with them.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

310/95: For Immediate Release: 21 November 1995

PENDLE MP SLAMS PM’s PLEDGE ON INHERITANCE TAX

The Prime Minister’s pledge to abolish Inheritance Tax has been slammed by local MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster earlier today he described the proposal as a slap in the face for the hard working majority of people.

The controversial proposal may appear in next week’s Budget on 28 November.

The MP said: “The PM’s promise will cost the nation at least £4.6 billion. It is a commitment to a tiny privileged few at the expense of the rest of us.”

“A tiny number of people pay inheritance tax. So very few will gain from its abolition. Out of 600,000 estates only 16,500 paid inheritance tax in the last year for which figures are available (1991/92). So less than 3% of estates will gain.”

“In 1994 the top 10 wills were worth £179 million, so those 10 estates would have gained up to £72 million - over £7 million each. Only £231 million was collected in 1991-92 from estates valued at under £300,000.”

“According to The Economist (22 July 95) half the benefit of ending inheritance tax would go to the heirs of the 2,000 biggest estates.”

“The vast majority of the £1.6 billion which will be raised by

Inheritance Tax this year comes from Britain's richest estates.
So, as with the proposed abolition of capital gains tax, a small elite will be subsidised at the expense of the hard working majority.

“The Prime Minister has told us he wants a classless society with “wealth cascading down the generations. Is this really what he means?”

Note to Editors: On 13 July 1995, John Major pledged that *"When if is appropriate and we can afford to do so, I wish to abolish both capital gains tax and inheritance tax".*

More follows

Inheritance Tax

Minimum value of Estate 1991/2	Number taxed	Total Tax they will save from the abolition of Inheritance Tax	Tax per person saved from abolition of Inheritance Tax
£100,000+	6,799	£63.5 million	£9,340
£200,000+	4,502	£168.5 million	£37,428
£300,000+	3,098	£256.6 million	£82,828
£500,000+	1,527	£265.9 million	£168,238
£1,000,000+	406	£148 million	£364,532
£2,000,000+	157	£141.2 million	£899,363
Total	16,489	£1,043.8 million	

Source: Inland Revenue Statistics 1995 table 12.4

Who gains from abolishing Capital Gains Tax?

* Only 86,000 individuals (and trusts) paid capital gains tax in the last year for which figures are available. So just one in three hundred taxpayers will gain.

* A privileged few will gain millions. Less than 500 people, each disposing of assets worth more than £1 million would gain a total of at least £217 million. At least £434,000 each.

* The very best off will gain twice over. Once from the gains on assets they already hold and again from opportunities for tax avoidance.

Of the small number who do pay it, most pay very little. Half of those paying capital gains tax paid an average of £567 on gains averaging over £7,000. The total tax collected from these 38,000 was just £21m.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

311/95: For Immediate Release: 21 November 1995

MP CALLS FOR "SHARK FREE ZONE"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to warn people of the dangers of loan sharks offering credit at extortionate rates of interest. He is supporting Carlisle MP Eric Martlew, in a Commons bid to control the sharks.

Prentice said: "Pick up any national tabloid on any day of the week and there are pages of loans on offer. Many people are finding it a struggle just to make ends meet. There are water, gas and electricity bills, food and all the other essential items and for many people the attractions of a loan to get through a sticky period is just irresistible. As we approach Christmas the temptations will be even greater."

"People should be made aware of what a loan involves and the terms need to be spelt out in neon lights. There are no painless ways of repaying debt."

"There are too many finance companies making a good living out of people living on the bread line."

Note to Editors: Eric Martlew's Commons motion reads: This House calls upon the Minister for Competition & Consumer Affairs to support a new national initiative pioneered by Carlisle City Council with particular reference to the outlawing of any Annual Percentage Rate more than twice the maximum rate prevailing at High Street banks; the withdrawal of Office of Fair Trading proposals which would, if implemented, remove any legal obligation to provide APR details on loans under £150; the standardisation of documentation relating to loan agreements so that all such documentation prominently displays on each page or pages the rate of APR applicable to that agreement; the ending of pernicious money lending practices such as the deduction of the first payment from the loan itself and, finally, the imprinting on accounts/invoices of Government agencies/departments (eg Contribution Agency forms and Benefit and Pension Books) of a standard form of wording alerting the recipient(s) to the dangers of extortionate credit.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

312/95: For Immediate Release: 22 November 1995

MP BACKS HISTORIC COUNTY SIGNS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a Commons move by Conservative MP for Bolton North East, Peter Thurnham, which urges local councils to signpost historic county boundaries.

The Early Day Motion - which is to appear on the Order Paper on Monday 27th November - will mark the 700th anniversary of the arrival of the first Lancashire MPs at Westminster.

The Pendle MP said: "There was some controversy a couple of months ago over the **"Welcome to Yorkshire"** sign which appeared at the old county boundary near Great Hague Farm between Foulridge and Kelbrook. I made it clear at the time that many people feel a very strong sense of place and identity and I am relaxed about the erection of historic county boundary signs."

"I suppose you could say it is a sign of the times."

Note 1 to Editors: The EDM reads: "That this House notes that today is the 700th anniversary of the arrival of the first Lancashire MPs, Mattheus de Redman and Johannes de Eywas, at Westminster and recognises the distinct loyalties which are still felt to the historic county of Lancashire. It calls upon local councils to signpost the traditional boundaries of Lancashire and of the other historic counties of England such as Westmoreland, Yorkshire and Cheshire."

Note 2 to Editors: At a meeting of the Unite Craven group on 22 September the MP said people had been conned by the Government into believing a new authority straddling the Yorkshire/Lancashire boundary was ever on the cards - or that the county boundary was going to be moved. He said there was no power for an area to be separated from its current county for ceremonial functions while remaining within its current county for administrative purposes. This was confirmed by the Local Government Minister, Sir Paul Beresford, on 30 October in a letter to the Pendle MP.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

313/95: For Immediate Release: 22 November 1995

MP QUESTIONS COUNCIL POLICY ON "ONE DAY SALES"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to ask Pendle Council to look again at its policy of letting civic halls to traders who run "one day sales". These sales hit the headlines last month when, under Parliamentary privilege, the MP denounced William Beach as a fraudster and a cheat. Beach, the Cheltenham trader and director of Table Top Marketing conned people into buying rubbish at sales at the Great Marsden Hotel and the North Valley Community Centre.

The MP said: "One day sales pose special problems and everyone must be on their guard. I am deeply concerned about these sales and I assume the council ran checks on Wentworth Trading before hiring out the Civic Theatre in Nelson to them - especially after all the earlier publicity about Beach."

"The council should also think of the effect on local traders. After all, it is they who have to shoulder the burden of business rates."

"No-one in their right mind would want to discourage sales put on by charitable groups, women's institutes, church organisations and the like but the policy on hiring halls to commercial organisations should be subject to the most searching scrutiny."

"People in Pendle have been once bitten by an acknowledged fraudster and cheat. I am determined to ensure Pendle is not seen as a soft touch."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

314/95: For Immediate Release: 23 November 1995

MINISTER OFFERS NO HELP WITH SPORTS HALL FUNDING

Heritage Minister, Iain Sproat, says the gap in funding for the planned new Brierfield Sports Hall will have to be bridged with cash raised locally. There is currently a shortfall of over £200,000 between what has been pledged and the cost of construction.

The Minister told local MP, Gordon Prentice, this week that the Lottery distributing bodies have to ensure a *"significant element of partnership funding is forthcoming from non-Lottery sources".* The Minister went on: *"While the Sports Council has indicated that a percentage of 35% is indicative of the partnership funding it would expect, demonstrating the financial commitment of other parties to a project is a powerful expression of support for the scheme."*

Prentice said: "The Minister recognises there is a problem and says he hopes it can be resolved - but he offers no solution. I told the Secretary of State last month that people in Pendle were thrilled to bits to get the two sports halls but there were real problems in funding their construction and, indeed, in funding the revenue costs."

"We have the Lottery money and significant contributions from Mansfield School and Brierfield Town Council. I believe Pendle Council has yet to say what its contribution will be and has been looking to Lancashire County Council to make up the difference -but the County, too, has its financial problems. In fact, we need a detailed report from our local council setting out a strategy for bridging the financial gap."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

315/95: For Immediate Release: 27 November 1995

PRIVATISED BUS COMPANIES GIVE FEW GUARANTEES ON SERVICE LEVELS

Guarantees on jobs and service levels sought by local authorities when selling their bus companies have proved very short lived according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says the much trumpeted guarantees in previous bus sales never amounted to much once the dust had settled and ownership had changed.

"The Transport Minister, Steve Norris, told me there were very few cases where the terms of employment of the workforce were formally protected and only "in a few cases" were minimum service levels stipulated."

"I doubt if Pendle Council will be in a position to make a decision on the sell-off until after Christmas and by then the clock will be ticking towards the March deadline when the Council can spend 50% of the proceeds of the sale rather than the 75% at present. The private bus operators know this and they will be pitching their bids with this in mind. They want the Council to sell the buses at a giveaway price."

Note to Editors The Transport Minister, Steven Norris wrote to the Pendle MP as follows:

“I promised to write in reply to five Questions concerning municipal bus companies which you tabled for answer on 8 November, just before the end of the Session.

Two of the Questions were concerned with previous sales of municipal bus companies, two were about our policy with respect to restricted bidding for, and the sale of a 50% stake in, a jointly owned municipal bus company, and the last asked about contact with Price Waterhouse Corporate Finance "concerning the proposed sale by Pendle Council of its stake in Burnley and Pendle Buses". I shall deal with the matters in that order.

In nearly all of the cases where a municipal bus company has been sold the local authority vendor imposed conditions on the sale. It would not be appropriate to list these in detail: suffice to say that the conditions were of varying complexity and duration depending on the importance given to them by the vendor. Standard conditions often dealt with the assets of the

more follows

company, such as property, so that any subsequent excess profits in the event of an on-sale should be shared, usually on a ten year reducing taper, with the vendor. There were very few cases where the employment terms of the workforce were formally protected - although some purchasers promised that there would be no redundancies for a given (usually quite short) period. In a few instances minimum service levels were stipulated as part of the sale, again for a limited (usually three years maximum) period.

I should emphasise that such covenants are essentially a matter for the local authority and the purchaser concerned. The Secretary of State's concern, in considering whether or not to consent to the terms of such sales, is confined to ensuring that the purchaser was not taking on such onerous conditions that it would fetter its ability to react in a commercial way should market conditions in the area change.
The arrangements made by the purchaser to cover the pension rights of employees of municipal bus companies are looked at carefully by the Secretary of State in considering whether to give consent to a sale. We have no information on any changes in pension terms which may have occurred following a sale.

You asked about our policy in respect of sales of municipal bus companies where the sale offer is made to a restricted number of selected potential purchasers. Our aim is to ensure that such sales result in the best value for money for the local authority, bearing in mind the state of bus competition locally. Our preference is for a normal open competitive sale but, where it is argued that a public announcement of the intention to sell may bring about destabilising competition that could depress the value of the company, we will be prepared to consider agreeing to a **private** competitive sale. In such cases local authority vendors are required to clear the short list of bidders with my Department to ensure that the essential features of a competitive sale are retained.

You asked about the factors the Secretary of State would take into account in deciding whether or not to consent to the sale of a 50 per cent stake in a jointly owned municipal bus company where one authority wants to sell and the other does not. Under Section 75 of the Transport Act 1975 the Secretary of State will consider each sale on its merits and take account of the different circumstances which prevail in each case. If one partner in a jointly owned company was unwilling to sell its 50 per cent shareholding, he would need to take that view into account as well as considering the interests of the company as a whole if a 50 per cent public sector involvement were to continue.

Finally, you asked about contacts with Price Waterhouse Corporate Finance concerning "the proposed sale by Pendle Council of its stake in Burnley and Pendle Buses". For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it is not my practice to disclose the details of any correspondence on such an issue. As promised I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library.

STEVEN NORRIS

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

316/95: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1995

MPs SAY LIBERAL COUNCILLOR SHOULD NOT VOTE ON BUS SELL-OFF

Pendle Liberal councillor, Ian Gilhespy, an employee of the private bus operator "Stagecoach" which is bidding to take over the council owned bus company, Burnley and Pendle Transport, should not vote on the proposed sale say the area's two MPs.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and Burnley's Peter Pike, have tabled a Commons motion condemning Liberal controlled Pendle Council for its planned sale of the local bus company. The MPs say the sale is misconceived and short sighted as the bus company regularly turns in a healthy profit for both councils. They say the proposition was never put before the electorate at the local elections in May 1995.

The MPs also criticise Ian Gilhespy and the Liberal Mayor of Pendle, Gillian Gilhespy, for instructing solicitors to threaten a writ for libel damages following the publication of a leaflet by the Pendle Labour Party drawing attention to Ian Gilhespy's employment with Stagecoach - one of the bidders for the council company - and questioning whether he should vote on the issue.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Cllr Gilhespy will no doubt seek advice from Pendle's Chief Executive on whether he should declare an interest before voting on this contentious matter - or, indeed, whether he should properly vote at all. Whatever the advice he gets, the onus rests with Mr Gilhespy to make his own decision. He should take into account what local people think about the sell-off. 10,000 signed a petition against the sale."

"My own view is that he should not vote on the sale and I am sure my view is shared by many others. As an employee of one of the most ravenous predators in the industry, Stagecoach, I do not consider his interest to be so trifling or so remote as to be ignored. We are talking here about the sale of public assets to private interests."

More follows
Bus sell off

Note 1 to Editors: The Pendle MP has asked the Transport Secretary for details of the £6m gift by the Chairman of British Bus to the former Chairman of National Express. The pay-off - in recognition of an earlier
business arrangement - was disclosed in yesterday's Sunday Telegraph

Note 2 to Editors: The text of the Early Day Motion which will appear on the order paper of the Commons tomorrow (28 November) reads as follows:

Ian Gilhespy and Burnley and Pendle Transport

This House notes that the Liberal controlled Pendle Council jointly owns with Burnley Borough Council a municipal transport undertaking known as Burnley and Pendle Transport, and that the Liberals wish to sell the entire company or, in the absence of an agreement with Burnley, Pendle's 50% stake to a private bus operator; congratulates Burnley Council on its steadfast refusal to sell; believes that the planned sale by the Liberals is misconceived and short sighted in that the bus company regularly turns in a healthy profit for both councils; notes that the proposition was never put before the electorate at the local elections in May 1995 and that the Liberals have no mandate for the sale; expresses concern that a Liberal Councillor, Ian Gilhespy, is an employee of and shareholder in Stagecoach which is bidding to buy the company; believes that Cllr Gilhespy should not vote on the sale when it comes up before the council on the grounds that he has a direct interest; utterly deplores the actions of Mr Gilhespy and the Liberal Mayor of Pendle, Gillian Gilhespy, in threatening through their solicitors to issue a writ for libel damages in respect of a leaflet circulated by the Pendle Labour Party which draws attention to these facts and which asks rhetorically whether these councillors should vote on the sell off; and believes the Liberal Council should not sell a profitable publicly owned asset to a private bus operator whose guarantees on jobs, terms and conditions of employees and service levels are likely to be worthless should the sale go through.

Gordon Prentice
Peter Pike

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

317/95: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1995

RISE IN POLICE NUMBERS "DERISORY" says PENDLE MP

In Lancashire in February this year there were 3,212 police officers in the county compared with 3,205 in December 1991 - an increase of 7 over a period of over three years. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says the figures blow apart the Government's claim that they are putting more police on the streets. In Lancashire there is one police officer for every 442 people.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "In fact, the Annual Report of HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary for 1994/5 which was published on 25 October tells us

there was a decline in police numbers from 128,045 in 1992 to 127,358 in 1994. The latest figure in the report (March 1995) puts the figure at 127,222."

"The Government is now promising 5,000 more police on the street - but they are well practised in promising things and failing to deliver. They have been talking about more police for years but the reality never caught up with the rhetoric."

"Now, in desperation and in order to get a more visible police presence on the streets, the County Police Authority is now going for part-time police stations! People do not want to see a trade off between more police on the streets and their local police station. They want both."

"The rise in crime is deeply worrying. In Lancashire the risk of a household being burgled is one in 12. It was one in 43 in 1979. The risk of a vehicle being broken into is one in 7. It was one in 15 in 1979. And the risk of a person being assaulted is one in 123 It was one in 283 in 1979. It is a deplorable record."

ends

Note to Editors: Lancashire Crime File. Table follows overleaf

Lancashire Crime File

	1979	1989	Year ending June 95	% increase since 79	% increase since 89	Incidents per 100,000 pop at June 95
Violence against the person	1995	2843	3095	55	9	218
Sexual Offences	541	683	533	-1	-22	38
Robbery	118	240	637	440	165	45
Total Violent Crime	2654	3766	4265	61	13	300
House Burglary	5476	9275	17514	220	89	1233
Other Burglary	6972	7742	10262	47	33	722
Car Theft	6619	8229	9711	47	18	684
Theft from cars	5440	14202	21548	296	52	1517

Other theft and handling	18676	21951	29208	56	33	2056
Fraud and Forgery	2512	3670	3438	37	-6	242
Criminal Damage	8497	20218	25985	206	29	1829
ALL OFFENCES	57105	89917	123192	116	37	8671

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

318/95: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1995

MP SLATES PRIME MINISTER'S RECORD

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has described John Major's fifth anniversary in Downing Street as five years of failure.

The Pendle MP said: "It is exactly five years since John Major was elected leader of the Conservative Party. In December 1990, the Prime Minister told the Independent on Sunday *"I do not care a hoot about the fat cats, the extremely able. What I am concerned about are the chaps who work hard and haven't quite made it - who feel trapped."*

"The Prime Minister told BBC Newsnight when he was elected leader of the Conservative Party: *"Taxes must be lower, when affordable. It is particularly important for those who are poorly paid.""*

"But since then, and taking into account today's Budget, the typical family's tax bill has risen by £670. There have on average been six tax rises every year. Unemployment has risen by half a million. Annual house repossessions have more than doubled and more than a third of those who bought homes in the year John Major became Prime Minister now have negative equity. Their homes are worth less now than what they paid for them."

"The number of people in households dependent on income support has risen by 40%. The number of general and senior managers in the NHS has more than doubled. Recorded crime has increased by 12% and the proportion of crimes cleared up has fallen from 32% to 26%."

"All in all, it is hardly a record to celebrate."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

319/95: For Immediate Release: 28 November 1995

THE 7P UP IP DOWN BUDGET

Today's Budget was described by local MP, Gordon Prentice, as the last gasp of a discredited Government. He said: "Nobody will be fooled by 1p off the basic rate of income tax when taxes have gone up since 1992 by the equivalent of 7p in the pound. This is not the Budget of a government that is succeeding but of a government that, after sixteen years, has failed - on taxes, living standards and public services and borrowing."

"Even after this Budget people are still £670 worse off because of the tax increases since the election. These are not exactly the same tax cuts Labour argued for but, after a 7p tax rise, the biggest in our history, we will not oppose them. People have suffered more than enough."

"This is not an honest Budget. It gives with one hand but takes with the other."

"The reason why taxes are high and the government is forced to cut public spending on hospitals and road-building is that, after 16 years, the economy is so weak while unemployment remains unacceptably high. The huge deterioration in the PSBR compared to previous forecasts is a clear sign of this."

"The only long-term solution to the unemployment and public spending difficulties we face is investment to strengthen our economy, a radical welfare-to-work programme and a fair tax system which rewards hard work. Only by getting people back to work can we build a strong economy. The Government should have adopted Labour's plan for a windfall levy, then they could have begun to break the logjam of unemployment."

"This is a Budget designed by the Chancellor to save the Government's bacon at the next election. I think they can expect a bit of a roasting."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

320/95: For Immediate Release: 29 November 1995

MINISTER RULES OUT PROTECTION FOR EXPLOITED HOMEWORKERS

The Minister for Industrial Relations, Jonathan Evans, has ruled out any regulation of the homeworking industry. He told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, that regulating homeworking "would represent an unacceptable burden on the great majority of employers.

The MP contacted the Minister after the Lancashire Evening Telegraph last month ran a story of a homeworker paid less than £1 an hour for intricate sewing and dressmaking.

The Pendle MP said: "Homeworking in East Lancashire is widespread. It is rife with exploitation and the industry is crying out to be regulated. The Minister typically is turning a blind eye to a very real problem."

Note to Editors: Jonathan Evans MP wrote to the Pendle MP on 24 November as follows: "Thank you for your letter of 6 November to Gillian Shephard enclosing a cutting from the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph,* about the rates of pay your constituent received as a homeworker. Your letter was passed to my Department,

which has responsibility for pay matters, and I am replying as the Minister for Industrial Relations.

The Government believes that pay and other terms and conditions of employment for homeworkers, as with other workers, are matters best determined between employers and workers in the light of their particular local circumstances, without Government intervention. Individual businesses are best placed to know what they can afford to pay and what is needed to recruit and retain suitable workers.

We encourage homeworking as a form of work which provides an opportunity for people to follow a more flexible working pattern thereby benefiting workers and employers alike. It also allows people to combine work with family commitments, for example by enabling them to work hours that suit their particular circumstances. Furthermore, some people are able to remain economically active by working at home, at times when the alternative might be unemployment.

We believe that employers should treat employees with consideration and should adopt fair personnel policies, which maintain high levels of employee morale and commitment but, of course, instances such as the case highlighted in the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph,* will occur from time to

time. The Government is helping to promote good practice in the use of homework and telework, by carrying out and disseminating the results of research into specific forms of homeworking, and by publishing information and guidance on flexible working, individual employment rights and health and safety.

The regulation of homeworking would represent an unacceptable burden on the great majority of employers and would be likely to discourage the use of a form of work which can offer considerable advantages for both employers and employees, as well as wider economic benefits.

I hope this has explained the position."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

321/95: For Immediate Release: 4 December 1995

SMITH+NEPHEW SNUBBED BY MINISTER

One of Pendle's major employers - Brierfield's Smith and Nephew - has been told their revolutionary bandage for treating leg ulcers will not be put on the prescription list. Inclusion in the list would make it widely available to thousands of patients.

Health Minister, Gerald Malone, told local MP, Gordon Prentice, last week that the four layer bandage for leg ulcers "may already be provided cost effectively to patients in clinics and at home through Community Health Services".

The Pendle MP said: "One of our major employers has, regrettably, been snubbed by the Health Minister. Smith and Nephew has invested millions of pounds at Brierfield and this revolutionary bandage could offer relief to thousands of sufferers from leg

ulcers. The Minister's reply is totally inadequate. I shall be pressing for this bandage to be included on the prescription list which will make it more widely available."

"I am meeting people from the company and clinicians at the Commons tomorrow to decide where we go from here."

Note to Editors: 400,000 people nationwide suffer from leg ulcers. But the Government is holding the company back from selling its revolutionary new bandage to the NHS. In Pendle alone, Smith and Nephew estimate that over 850 people suffer from leg ulcers, and of those over 200 have open ulcers. The four layer bandage helps the healing process and stays on longer without needing to be changed.

There is a stand-off between the Department of Health and the Health Authorities who operate at local level. Both sides point to the savings the other is likely to make and say buying the bandages is the other's responsibility.Bandages and dressings have been available via prescription since the formation of the NHS. The Government says Health Authorities can buy their own bandages from within their own budgets. The Health Authorities say they can't do it because nursing time savings (in changing bandages etc) do not release cash and, in any event, they cannot transfer money out of the prescription budget into another budget.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

322/95: For Immediate Release: 4 December 1995

GOVERNMENT CONFIRMS LINK BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME

The Government has confirmed there is a link between levels of unemployment and crime according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP says: "Buried in the small print of last week's local government finance settlement are the factors taken into account when distributing money from central government to Police Authorities across the country - the Police Grant."

"The grant takes factors such as population density, overcrowding and the number of rented properties into account when distributing grant. But the government also looks at the level of young male unemployment and this, too, is built into the equation.

"For most of us this hardly comes as a blinding revelation. It is a matter of simple common sense that young men without jobs are more likely to get into trouble with the police. Yet the Government has always maintained there is no correlation between unemployment and crime. It has been obvious to everyone else. Belatedly, they now recognise there is a link."

"We all know that unemployment has been deliberately used as an instrument of Government policy to manage the economy. We all remember Norman Lamont's infamous claim that *"unemployment is a price well worth paying"*.

Note to Editors: Last week the MP released figures which showed there are 3,212 police officers in the county (February 95) compared with 3,205 in December 1991 - an increase of only 7 over a period of over three years. In Lancashire there is one police officer for every 442 people.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

323/95: For Immediate Release: 7 December 1995

SECTION 11 CUTS "DEEPLY DAMAGING" says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet a delegation of Lancashire County Councillors later today to discuss the threat to vital Section 11 funding which provides special help to underachieving people from ethnic minorities.

The MP said: "I am very concerned indeed about the impact of further cuts in the s11 budget. It is short-sighted in the extreme to cut back on this essential work."

The MP added: "The County Council tells me the original s11 funding agreement for April 1992 led to a reduction from 430 to 360 teachers in this area of work. Changes in the level of grant since 1992 have reduced this total to 257. A reduction of £1.66m is equivalent to a further 72 teachers. These are extremely worrying figures."

Note to Editors: The County Council writes: Lancashire is seriously concerned that funding to meet the needs of underachieving and disadvantaged members of ethnic minorities is already inadequate and may be severely reduced in 1997/98.

Local authorities are assisted financially to meet the needs of underachieving members of ethnic minorities (including children newly arrived in the UK) through Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. These resources are administered either by the Home Office or by the Department of the Environment as part of the Single Regeneration Fund.

The allocation of Section 11 finances to local authorities was reorganised by central government in 1992. Bids for the funding of projects had to be agreed by the Home Office. These had to contain precise targets for improving achievement, and if successful were approved for either a three or five year period.

Funding is now provided for new projects only on a pound-for-pound basis. If this pattern is repeated for the major schools' projects in April 1997, the County Council will lose a further £1.66m. This will have a disastrous effect on the County Council's services to underachieving members of ethnic minorities.

EDUCATION ETHNIC MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT PROJECTS

Section 11 funding

Funding for the current schools Projects terminates in March 1997. It is not yet known whether government will invite new bids and, if so, what the funding arrangements will be. However, recent trends in Section 11 funding make the County Council apprehensive about the future.

The original funding agreement for April 1992 led to a reduction from 430 to 360 teachers in this area of work. Changes in the level of grant since 1992 have reduced this total to 257. A reduction of £1.66m is equivalent to a further 72 teachers.

In order to cope with recent grant reductions, support had to be withdrawn totally from 44 schools and 549 pupils in September 1994. Reductions were made in the level of input at schools where direct support continues.

Children are not normally withdrawn from lessons. Project teachers work mainly in partnership in the classroom to support targeted children and help them to gain access to the National Curriculum. However, OFSTED reports on schools where support was reduced in September 1994 are beginning to show indicators to the effect that children have been adversely affected by the cuts. For example, for one secondary school the OFSTED report reads:

The deployment for supporting ethnic minority pupils is appropriate but the overall time allowed to the school is insufficient for the number of pupils who require this help to make progress.

and for a secondary school where support was withdrawn that:

There is no externally provided support for bilingual children. Analysis of 1994 GCSE results shows that the proportion of bilingual pupils who gained 5 or more A-C grades was well below the proportion of the whole year group who gained 5 or more A-C grades.*

This is in sharp contrast to the improvement in GCSE grades in schools where support has been maintained.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

324/95: For Immediate Release: 6 December 1995

CABLE GIANT NYNEX PROMISES TO BE CAREFUL

The cable company Nynex which is currently digging up Brierfield and Nelson has given assurances to local MP, Gordon Prentice, that they will act speedily on all complaints they receive.

The meeting at Westminster yesterday between the Pendle MP and Nynex chiefs followed months in which complaints streamed in to the MP's office and to Pendle Council.

The MP said: "It is in the interests of Nynex to do a good job first time round. If it is poor work they will have to go back a second time. It is as simple as that. And penalties can be imposed."

"On the vexed question of expanding the franchise area to take in West Craven, the news was less good. Nynex bought the Blackburn franchise (which includes part of Pendle) from the MacLean Hunter Cable Company and has no plans to bid for a license to cable West Craven."

"There is a very real danger that the information society will pass by rural and semi rural areas and small towns. Digital Television carrying up to 20 additional channels will be going to the most heavily populated areas first and, here again, there is the prospect of places like West Craven being last in the queue."

“The new digital technology is not simply about having the choice of watching countless films or game shows. It will unlock an enormous storehouse of information and, most importantly, it is two way communication.

“I am absolutely determined Pendle does not enter the new information age long after everyone else.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

325/95: For Immediate Release: 6 December 1995

50 JOBS TO GO AT SMITH+NEPHEW

The loss of 50 jobs at Smith+Nephew’s Briefield Mills has been described as an unexpected body blow by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: “I visited the company as recently as 10 November and I had no inkling this was in prospect - despite asking the senior management specifically about any changes in prospect in the size of the workforce. After all the earlier job losses I wanted to be reassured that we could look forward to a period of stability and, hopefully, expansion. Then this.”

“I met Chris O’Donnell, Smith+Nephew’s Group Director, at Brierfield and again yesterday at Westminster when he told me one of the key reasons for the job losses was non payment for goods exported to Saudi Arabia and Iran. I am taking these matters up directly with the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry.”

“I am also continuing to press the Department of Health to put the company's revolutionary new four layer bandage on the prescription list which would make it more widely available. The bandage is used to treat leg ulcers. So far the Health Minister has refused to budge but I am hopeful that if enough pressure is brought to bear he will change his mind. I am told it could mean another 15 jobs at Brierfield.”

“People are truly sick of a steady diet of redundancies. I know I am.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

326/95: For Immediate Release: 6 December 1995

GOVERNMENT TO COME CLEAN ON CEMFUEL

At long last, the Government is to say what it thinks about the burning of the controversial fuel, Cemfuel, by Castle Cement at its works at Clitheroe.

Environment Minister, James Clappison, told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today that the Government is to make a full response early in the New Year to the report of the

House of Commons Environment Committee, published last June, which called for an investigation into the alleged effects on health of burning the fuel.

The Pendle MP pressed the Minister to give full details of reports he has received from the Pollution Inspectorate about persistent plume grounding at Clitheroe and the possible risk to public health. James Clappison said: “Ministers are fully aware of the reported incidence of plume grounding and the investigative monitoring that the National Physical Laboratory carried out on behalf of HMIP. The results of this investigation are being reviewed by the Department of Health.”

Prentice said: “I am relieved we are to get the considered view of the Government on this issue which is causing so much anxiety over in Clitheroe and the surrounding villages. Smoke from Castle Cement’s chimneys can, of course, drift across into my own constituency and this obviously concerns me.”

Note to Editors: In February 1995, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. The consultation period ended on 29 March. In June, the House of Commons Environment Committee published a report making specific recommendations which included one calling on the Government to carry out a thorough survey of human and animal health in the vicinity of cement kilns (both those burning Secondary Liquid Fuel - such as cemfuel- and those burning only coal) in order to establish or disprove the alleged links between kiln pollution and health effects.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

327/95: For Immediate Release: 5 December 1995

SPARKS FLY AS ELECTRICITY BOSSES CASH IN ON £12 BILLION BONANZA

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today attacked the Conservative Government for failing to stand up for the consumer as the directors and shareholders of Regional Electricity Companies stand to cash in on a £13.76 billion bonanza in a frenzy of takeover bids.

“Altogether, eight of the the twelve regional electricity companies (Recs) in England and Wales are the subject of takeover bids. The bids have been made by a range of companies, involving US multinationals, power generators and water companies.”

“The total amount bid so far for the eight companies (serving 14.48 million customers) is £13.76bn. This is the equivalent of £889 per customer - but the consumer will not see a penny from the deals.”

The Pendle MP said, "This is further evidence that in the privatised electricity supply industry, directors and shareholders come first, whilst the consumer comes bottom of the heap.”

"The 14.5 million people who have seen their own electricity supplier bid for will want to know why they will see none of this bonanza.”

"And they will want to know why the Government has refused to stand up for their interests and guarantee them a fair deal."

Note to Editors: Further information follows

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

328/95: For Immediate Release: 5 December 1995

MP SAVAGES "15p AN HOUR" BOSS

The employer of a Colne dressmaker who was paid 15p an hour was yesterday savaged by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who described the Manchester based boss of Christina Fashions, Peter Pomgourou, as a "loathsome" individual.

Speaking in the Budget debate, the Pendle MP said Pomgourou had told the local press that if Mrs Smith (not her real name) "didn't want the money she has no need to work for me. Mind your own business."

"I sent the file to the Minister asking him to start regulating the homeworking industry but the Government refuses to act. They are allowing some employers to ruthlessly exploit people."

Speaking at Westminster after the debate the MP said: "This is a Government of double standards and questionable ethics. A Government of knaves and fools."

Note to Editors: Speech enclosed

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

329/95: For Immediate Release: 6 December 1995

MP BACKS TUC "BAD BOSS" HOTLINE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the TUC's "Bad Boss" Hotline which is running this week and through to Monday 11 December for exploited employees to report their working conditions. The number is 0345 233233 and is charged at local call rates.

The MP said "I believe it is the first time the TUC has undertaken such a project and they have chosen the north west because of the long hours worked and low jobs growth in the region."

"The TUC tells me they are working with the BBC Here and Now programme who are interested in exposing Britain's worst bosses."

"They can look no further than Peter Pomgourou of Christina Fashions of Manchester. He is the man I described in the Commons on Monday as loathsome for the way in which he exploits the people who work for him."

"Callers to the hotline will be able to talk to trained advice workers."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

330/95: For Immediate Release: 7 December 1995

MP WINS COMMONS DEBATE ON BUS SELL-OFF

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be raising the controversial issue of the sale of Burnley and Pendle Transport in a Commons debate next Wednesday (13 December).

The MP was given the go-ahead by the Speaker to bring the proposed sell-off to the floor of the Commons.

The MP said: "I am grateful to have the opportunity of setting the record straight - especially given the threats of legal action which have come from Liberal councillors."

"Local people want their buses to be run by their local councils. The Liberal controlled Pendle council has no mandate for the sale. It is as simple and as straightforward as that."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

331/95: For Immediate Release: 7 December 1995

MP CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST SAUDI ARABIA FOR NON-PAYMENT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, blasted the Saudi Arabian Government in the Commons today for its refusal to pay for medical products exported to the country by Brierfield firm, Smith and Nephew.

The company is embroiled in controversy over its decision earlier this week to shed 50 jobs at Brierfield - blaming, in part, the reluctance of Iran and Saudi Arabia to part with their cash.

At Business Questions today, the MP urged the Leader of the House, Tony Newton, to make room on the Commons order paper for an urgent debate on the issue saying it was scandalous that tight fisted countries were putting his constituents out of work.

The MP said afterwards: "To add insult to injury, I received a Christmas card this morning from the Saudi Arabian Ambassador wishing me a happy festive season. If they coughed up for the bandages and other medical products they received I would have a very happy Christmas. And so would my constituents who are employed by Smith and Nephew."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

332/95: For Immediate Release: 8 December 1995

MP TELLS MINISTERS TO KEEP BARLICK POLICE STATION OPEN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has urged Home Office Minister David Maclean to intervene to keep Barnoldswick Police Station open round the clock. Lancashire Police want to cut its opening hours as a way of putting more police officers on the beat.

Speaking in the Commons today, the MP said: “People don’t want to have to choose between their police station and having officers on the beat. They want both and they should have both.”

He went on: "The rise in crime is deeply worrying. In Lancashire the risk of a household being burgled is one in 12. It was one in 43 in 1979. The risk of a vehicle being broken into is one in 7. It was one in 15 in 1979. And the risk of a person being assaulted is one in 123 It was one in 283 in 1979. It is a deplorable record.”

“There has been an explosion in crime in recent years although there has been some respite in the last twelve months. In Lancashire in 1990 there was a 20.4% increase in recorded crime over 1989. In 1991 a 14.2% increase and in 1992 a 9.5% increase. In 1993 a 1% increase.”

“Now we have the promise of 5,000 police officers over the next three years. But we have been here before. In 1992, the Prime Minister promised there would be an additional 1000 police officers. Nothing happened. The latest announcement promises an extra 28 officers for Lancashire over the next year. Even if we get the officers we would still have have the number of police officers in post below the police establishment of 3,229 which applied up to 1 April this year."

"The Government has been talking about more police for years but the reality has never caught up with the rhetoric.”

“In fact, in Lancashire, the number of police officers has never reached the police establishment figure or come close to it in any year since 1990. And this is despite the fact the County - and now

Police Stations

the Lancashire Police Authority - spend at or above the level the Government thinks is right for the area. (The SSA or Standard Spending Assessment)

“In 1995 there are four fewer police in post than 1990; 10 fewer than in 1991 and 14 fewer than in 1992. The Government ordered a freeze in police recruitment in 1993 and the number of officers in Lancashire dropped to 3,140. This year to September we have one police officer in the county more than last year.”

“Now, in desperation and in order to get a more visible police presence on the streets, the Lancashire Police Authority is now going for part-time police stations. But people do not want to see a trade off between more police on the streets and their local police station. They want both.”

“Clitheroe Police Station is now closed at night. Darwen was threatened but has now been reprieved. We await the fate of Barnoldswick which serves 20,000 people in West Craven."

"The part time police station policy hit people like a bolt from the blue. There was talk of more visible policing in the new Lancashire Policing Plan which was published in April this year but nothing about cutting back on the opening hours of police stations."

“I have a high regard for the Divisional Commander, Superintendent Peter Rawstrone, and for his new Chief Constable, Pauline Clare, and I hope they will listen to people living in the area. I also expect Ministers to get involved and not to pretend it is someone else’s problem, not theirs.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

333/95: For Immediate Release: 12 December 1995

PRIVATISED BUS COMPANIES SLAMMED IN NEW COMMONS REPORT

The all party House of Commons Select Committee on Transport is expected to slam the Government’s bus deregulation policy in a report to be published tomorrow (13 December).

The Committee’s report comes on the day when local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to criticise Liberal controlled Pendle Borough Council for its plans to sell off the council’s stake in the local bus company - Burnley and Pendle Transport.

The MP said: “Everyone knows that unrestrained deregulation has been an unmitigated disaster. We are now seeing the growth of huge privatised regional monopolies such as Stagecoach who are carving up the country’s bus network. And with the privatisation of the railways, Stagecoach is casting a beady eye over our trains as well. At the end of the day it is the passenger who is ultimately the loser.”

“The Transport Committee’s report comes at a very opportune time. I hope it will cause Pendle Council to pause for thought and think again. The Liberals have no mandate to sell our local bus company.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

334/95: For Immediate Release: 13 December 1995

MP TO QUIZ MINISTERS ON MAD COW DISEASE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to quiz Agriculture Ministers this Thursday in the Commons on the latest BSE scare. The MP said: “I know that very many people are concerned by recent press reports and news that eminent doctors such as Professor Tomlinson have given up eating beef.”

“When people eat a beefburger or a sausage they shouldn’t have to think about the possibility of getting CJD - the human equivalent of BSE. Lots of people are worried sick. I intend to get the facts from Ministers.”

Note to Editors:

Numbers

• 156,784 cases of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy have been confirmed on 34,064 UK farms from Nov 1986, when the disease was first identified, to 17 Nov 1995. 30% of all UK herds (13% of beef herds, 51% of dairy herds) have had at least one case of BSE.

• Up to 24 Oct 1995, 22,946 cases of BSE had been confirmed in animals born after the ruminant feed bans, imposed on 18 July 1988 in Britain and 11 January 1989 in N Ireland. MAFF states *'the majority of these had probably been exposed to ruminant protein in feed'*

• BSE has already cost UK taxpayers over £200m, the vast bulk in slaughter compensation.

Government delay

• The Government took 18 months from discovering BSE to make it notifiable, 20 months to introduce compulsory slaughter and compensation, 21/2 years to announce a ban on cattle offal in human food, and 5 more months to implement it. It was 18 months after introducing compulsory slaughter that full compensation was introduced - under-compensation until Feb 1990 must have deterred farmers from declaring suspect BSE cases.

Calves' brains

• In response to BSE, all specified offals of adult cattle were banned from human food. The 'specified offals' are the brain, spinal cord, spleen,

thymus, tonsils and intestines. The ban did not apply to cattle under 6 months.

• In June 1994 the Government banned calves' thymus and small intestines, when it was shown BSE can be transmitted to mice from intestines of calves fed BSE doses. Mechanically recovered meat from the spinal column of all cattle was banned in Nov 1995.

• All other specified calf offals - including brain and spinal cord - are *still* allowed into human food. In July 1990 the House of Commons Agriculture Select Committee recommended that the Government include calf offals in the ban. The Government refused.

• Labour has called on the Government to ban *all* specified cattle offal from human food.

School meals

• Concerns over BSE have led to bans on beef or beef products from school meals in several areas. There is no conclusive proof that there is or *that there is not* a link between BSE and CJD. With this in mind, Labour do not criticise local authorities, school governors or other bodies who choose to apply the precautionary principle in this way.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

335/95: For Immediate Release: 13 December 1995

MP WARNS OF HIKE IN COUNCIL TAX

The Budget contained many examples of the Chancellor giving with one hand, but taking away with the other says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

“Now that the dust has settled after the Budget it is clear the Government expects Council Tax increases to average 5 per cent or more next year. Councils will be forced to raise charges and cut services. Local people will be forced to pay more and get less.”

“This Council Tax increase, combined with higher charges for local services like school meals, meals on wheels and home helps and service reductions, will cost an average household £108 next year. The Government expects Council Tax payers to cough up an extra £3.5 billion over the next three years - equivalent to almost 2p on the standard rate of Income Tax.

“This is because figures released with the Budget show a £3.5 billion increase over the next three years in the amount which the Government expects Council Tax payers to provide to meet the shortfall between the Government’s estimate of what councils need to spend and the grant the Government will provide.

“Despite the Government's claims, there is no extra money for education. The detailed figures show that, if councils were to fall in line with the Government’s plans, they would spend less on education next year than they are spending on education now.”

“The Government's claims take no account of the increased number of schoolchildren, the cost of pay increases, the general impact of inflation or the need to meet new legal requirements such as installing seatbelts in school coaches.”

“There will be an extra 86,000 children at school next year. If they are taken into account and councils fall in line with the Government's published spending plans, then the amount spent per pupil next year will actually fall by £40 per pupil.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

336/95: For Immediate Release: 12 December 1995

PENDLE WINS SRB CASH

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed this morning’s news that Pendle Partnership has won vital cash from the Government’s Single Regeneration Budget.

Speaking at Westminster today the MP said: “This is marvellous news indeed. It is a real tonic and will give a big boost to the entire area.”

“My congratulations go to the Chairman of Pendle Partnership, Dennis Mendoros, to the local council and local businesses who have given such sterling support and, indeed, to everyone involved.”

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

337/95: For Immediate Release: 13 December 1995

MP BACKS 5 POINT GUIDE TO CUT GAS DEATHS

Gordon Prentice, MP for Pendle has issued a warning to local people following 8 deaths in the UK from carbon monoxide poisoning last month. 37 people were also injured in near misses.

A five-point survival plan for all gas and solid fuel users has been published by the gas safety organisation, CO-Gas and endorsed by the Pendle MP who is backing moves to alert consumers:

The Pendle MP said: "CO-Gas's survey is horrifying. The government should be publishing key advice, not leaving it to an outside organisation with limited resources. Ministers should act to ensure that highest safety standards are being enforced."

Shadow Consumer Minister, Nigel Griffiths, who is Chairman of CO-Gas is backing the MP. "CO-Gas has highlighted the failure of Corgi installers to detect major faults. Christopher Burton was hospitalised after a Corgi fitter failed to detect a faulty boiler in his private rented flat. Anna Cuell and her 4-week old daughter survived CO poisoning, in spite of her council house being given the all clear two weeks earlier by a Corgi registered fitter. The Corgi system is letting people down. It only registers the business, not the individual fitters and we are pressing for improvements in the registration system."

CO-Gas President, Stephanie Trotter has recorded the deaths and injuries in November. She says: "The lack of individual Corgi registration, inadequate training and public awareness of CO dangers is a scandal that must be dealt with. Unless fitters are registered as individuals how can incompetent gas operatives be struck off? The Government has proposals to consider this within two years, but that's far too long."

The problem is highlighted by the unreported case of Deborah Anne Harper of 8 Harlingwood, Wyndham Road, Camberwell. She is a 5th year medical student. She was showering and collapsed from CO poisoning in her rented flat. A Corgi registered company

certified the boiler safe on 13 January. Yet soot was found in the flue by a second Corgi registered fitter. He serviced it again on 23 November. Deborah's parents asked British Gas to check this work. Even after the second service within 12 months, the appliance was giving off 40 times the usual levels of CO.

Note to Editors:

* Chimneys and Flues must be swept regularly.
* Ensure your gas fitter uses a flue analyzer to check for the silent killer, CO Gas
* Get a 'Which?' recommended Carbon Monoxide detector.
* Remember that blocking up vents to stop draughts can lead to a build-up of CO Gas.
* Be aware that low levels of CO exposure over a long period of time can cause brain damage. Doctors can miss the symptoms.

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

338/95: For Immediate Release: 13 December 1995

TEXTILE INDUSTRY BLEEDING TO DEATH says PENDLE MP

The loss of another 61 job losses at Carrington Viyella's Holmefield Mill in Barrowford has been described as dreadful news by the area's MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster, the MP confessed it seemed impossible to staunch the haemorrhage of jobs out of the industry which used to be the economic mainstay of the region.

"I am in touch with the Managing Director, Bill Laidlaw, at Barrowford but the prognosis is not good. As is so often the case, the die was cast a decade or more ago with the Multi-Fibre Arrangement which allows textiles from the developing world preferential access to our markets."

"61 jobs are to disappear out of 92 leaving just 31 at Barrowford. I am told that only 20 looms will be running in future and they will be making bulk samples of woven fabric, using the design skills the company has in-house."

"The life is draining out of our local textile industry at an alarming rate. I am pressing for an urgent debate at Westminster on how we can try to turn things round."

"The Government cannot simply stand aside like a disinterested spectator. It has an absolute duty to get involved."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

339/95: For Immediate Release: 13 December 1995

WEAK ECONOMY PROMPTS CUT IN INTEREST RATES says PRENTICE

Kenneth Clarke and Eddie George met today and decided to cut interest rates by a quarter of one percent. The announcement comes on the day that the number of people out of work and claiming benefit in Pendle in November dropped to 1,876 (5.1%). 1,480 men are unemployed (7%) and 396 women (2.6%). There were 210 vacancies at the Nelson Job Centre and 120 at Colne.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The drop in unemployment is welcome even though we have a another wave of job losses about to engulf us in Pendle. The interest rate cut announced today comes not because the economy is strong, but because it is weak. With business investment still stagnant after three years of recovery, this interest rate cut can only strengthen the economy if it is combined with the measures the Opposition has proposed to increase long-term, investment in industry, skills and infrastructure. Increasing investment is the only route to long term sustainable growth. Under this Government, the UK has slumped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league."

"Because the Tories have failed to invest in the economy, it has not grown
and so there are fewer jobs and more people dependent on benefits.
The Tories have had to increase the tax burden to pay for their economic failure."

"Today's figures on retail sales and unemployment further illustrate Tory economic failure. The volume of retail sales for September to November 1995 is only .4% higher than the same period a year earlier. This underlines the continuing lack of any feelgood factor."

"Whilst the fall in unemployment of 20,400 is welcome, unemployment still remains far too high at 2,244,500 and the number of people in employment has fallen by 22,000. The claimant count is falling, but at the same time the number of people in employment is falling. The fall in unemployment therefore does not represent people going back to work, but people giving up on the labour market who are no longer eligible for benefit."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

340/95: For Immediate Release: 14 December 1995

HOMELESSNESS: PHOTOCALL

10am Sunday, 17 December 1995

Gordon Prentice MP will be meeting 20 members of the Barley FOG Club at 10am this Sunday at the Barley Methodist Chapel, Barley.

They are sleeping out all night from 8pm on Saturday 16th December to 10am on Sunday because they say they are outraged at what they have discovered about homelessness.

The MP said: “Homelessness is a terrible scourge but it doesn’t have to happen. The people in Barley are drawing to our attention the plight of the homeless who are too often forgotten by the rest of us.”

“Full marks to the young people of Barley.”

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341/95: For Immediate Release: 14 December 1995

MINISTER URGED TO PUT THE BRAKES ON PENDLE BUS SELL-OFF

Transport Minister, Steven Norris, was last night urged to think again before giving his consent to the proposed sale of Burnley and Pendle Transport.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said yesterday’s highly critical report from the Transport Select Committee on the consequences of bus deregulation should give the Government good reason to pause for thought. He said 13,000 local people had signed petitions against the sale but the Liberal Council hadn’t taken a blind bit of notice of public opinion. The MP challenged the Liberal Council to hold a referendum on the issue.

The MP said: “Despite all the talk in the press by Councillor Tony Greaves that the Government had given its informal approval to the sale, the Minister made it clear the Council has not yet asked the Secretary of State for his consent to the sale. And given that Burnley does not want to sell, that consent cannot necessarily be taken as a foregone conclusion.”

“The Liberals are in a deep hole over their bus sell-off policy and they should stop digging. It is a deeply unpopular policy.”

Note to Editors: Hansard extract follows

342/95: For Immediate Release: 20 December 1995

NO CHRISTMAS CHEER ON TAXES says PRENTICE

The New Year is going to be a pretty taxing period according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

“Since 1992, as the Chancellor has admitted, the Conservative Government put taxes up by the equivalent of seven pence on the basic rate. In last month's Budget they only gave one pence back.” The MP says it all adds up to a bleak New Year.

"From April next year a typical family will still be paying £670 more tax a year than at the time of the last election. The overall tax burden will be 36.5% next year, up from 34.75% in 1992. The tax burden is forecast to rise each year until the end of the century - reaching 37.5% by the year 2000."

"Council tax bills are going up: by £3.5 billion over the next three years. Council Tax bills will rise by as least as much next year as this year - 5.2% or more. Car taxes are

going up: 3.5p on a litre of petrol and £5 on Vehicle Excise Duty. Tobacco taxes are going up: by 15p on a packet of cigarettes, 6p on cigars and 8p on pipe tobacco."

"After freezing the size of the Married Couples Allowance five years running, and reducing its rate from 25% to 15%, the November budget increased the allowance by £70 (in line with the rate of inflation). But had the Married Couples Allowance been uprated in line with inflation since 1990, and if it were still available at 25%, it would now be worth £523. Instead it is only worth £269 - so its real value has halved."

"After freezing the personal allowance in both the March and November Budgets of 1993, last month's Budget increased the personal allowance by £100 more than inflation to £3,765, But had the personal allowance been uprated in line with inflation since the election it would now be worth £3,820 - so people are still starting to pay tax at a lower real level than in 1992."

More follows

No Christmas Cheer with tax rises

"After freezing the threshold of the 40 pence band in four out of the last 6 Budgets, this Budget increased it by £200 more than inflation to £25,500. But had the threshold of the 40 pence band been uprated in line with inflation since 1990 it would now be at £28,240 - that's why there are now a record number of people paying tax at 40 pence."

"Despite the fact that VAT on fuel would have been the fairest tax cut of all, nothing has been done on this. The Government is still fatally addicted to VAT."

"The Chancellor used his Budget to confirm the Tories long term priority of abolishing capital gains tax and inheritance tax - a massive subsidy for the very wealthiest at the expense of everyone else."

"The increase in the threshold for inheritance tax, unlike normal practice, does not take effect from Budget day. Instead the Tories are delaying it until April next year. And they have still failed to tackle the loopholes and abuses of inheritance tax."

In the November Budget the Government only raised the VAT threshold for small businesses by £1,000 - just half the rate of inflation, drawing more small businesses into the VAT net."

"In their 1992 Manifesto the Conservatives said they would "*maintain mortgage tax relief*." Since then they have cut mortgage tax relief by 40% and house prices have plummeted."

The Pendle MP added: "The rejection of the Opposition's proposal for a welfare to work programme paid for from the proceeds of a windfall levy on the privatised monopoly utilities, means long term and youth unemployment will remain stubbornly high, As a result taxpayers continue to bear the burden of the £20 billion cost of unemployment, paying the price of Conservative social and economic failure."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

343/95: For Immediate Release: 20 December 1995

MP PURSUES SMITH+NEPHEW's BAD DEBT PROBLEM

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is battling hard to get the Saudi Arabian Government to cough up the cash for goods sent to the oil rich Middle East state by the Brierfield firm, Smith and Nephew.

A fortnight ago - and in the wake of the controversy over the company's decision to shed 50 jobs at Brierfield - the MP savaged the Saudi Arabian Government in the Commons for the delaying payment for medical products. The company blamed the job losses in part on the reluctance of Iran and Saudi Arabia to part with their cash.

"I have written to the Saudi Arabian Ambassador asking him to use his good offices to move things along. I am also pressing the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry to turn up the heat on these habitual late payers."

Note to Editors: The Foreign Office Minister, Jeremy Handley, told the Pendle MP, last week:

"We have not received any representations from Smith and Nephew or other manufacturers about securing payment from Iran.

"We have not had any approaches from Smith and Nephew about Saudi Arabia, but the company informed my Rt Honourable Friend, the Member for Chippenham (Mr Needham), the then Minister of Trade, in June of their debt problem with Saudi Arabia. We have also had approaches from a number of other UK manufacturers. Some have been paid; most, like pharmaceutical companies, who supply on a regular basis, have been paid some of their older outstanding debts but are still about a year in arrears.

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344/95: For Immediate Release: 20 December 1995

BLACKBURN COUNCIL CAN GO IT ALONE SAYS COMMISSION

The Local Government Commission - the body charged with the task of re-drawing the council map of England - has recommended that Blackburn and Blackpool should be given "unitary status" with responsibility for all council services in the area currently provided by Lancashire County Council. The remaining 12 district councils in Lancashire would stay within a continuing two tier system.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, observed: "The Commission's recommendations now go to the Secretary of State but his approval is a formality. I am not in favour of the new structure. It will cost extra money and I am not at all sure it will provide a better service. The Audit Commission calculates that the net annual on-going costs of having a unitary Blackburn would range from a saving of £0.1m to a cost of £5.3m. This is an enormously wide range. They also calculate the transitional costs, excluding redundancy, early retirement and so on, at between £1.4m to £3m. It could be a very expensive exercise."

The MP added: "I am a firm believer in single tier local government. It improves accountability and transparency. But wrenching Blackburn and Blackpool out of a two

tier system which is otherwise to be left largely intact makes no sense. If Blackburn and Blackpool should have unitary status then where is the logic that says Lancaster, Preston and Burnley, to name but a few, cannot."

Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager: just leave your name and number and I'll get back to you) 071 219 4011 (House of Commons) 0282 695471 (Constituency)

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1/96 3/1/96

WHY ARE WE WAITING?

The yellow lines outside the Water Street home of Earby resident, Mr Croft have caused plenty of problems. The yellow lines were laid in 1992, a full 30 years after the Traffic Order authorising them was first made back in 1962. The astonishing case of the non-implementation of the ancient Traffic Order made at the start of the swinging sixties caught the attention of local MP, Gordon Prentice, after Mr Croft - who wants them removed - sought his help. When he bought his house years ago he says he didn't realise that parking restrictions were to apply outside his front door.

Now the issue is to be resolved at next Tuesday's meeting of the West Craven Area Committee (9 January) when a new Traffic Order is to be considered. After the MP intervened, officials at the Department of Transport told Pendle Council that implementing the original 30 year old Traffic Order could be open to challenge.

The MP said: "Whether "no parking" restrictions should be imposed in Water Street is a matter for the Council. But clearly the Crofts were upset that they had no opportunity to challenge the implementation of this ancient Traffic Order. They will now have the chance to put their case."

ends

Note to Editors: The Crofts requested publicity.

The following letter went from the Department of Transport's Traffic Policy Division to Pendle Council on 30 November.

WAITING RESTRICTIONS ON WATER STREET, EARBY DELAY OF 30 YEARS IN SIGNING TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER

I refer to your letters of 27 January 1994 and 16 October 1995 to Gordon Prentice MP (copies enclosed for ease of reference) about the signing of a Traffic Regulation Order imposing waiting restrictions on Water Street, Earby some 30
years after the Order was made. The matter has been referred to the Department.

On the basis of the information supplied in your letters, it is debatable whether your action in signing the Order 30 years after it was made was a proper use of
your powers. There is a strong case, if you consider that waiting restrictions should be introduced on Water Street, for your authority to make another Order
which would give Mr and Mrs Croft the opportunity to object before the Order was made. I would recommend this as the most acceptable way of taking the matter forward.

If you take a different view, I should be grateful if you would perhaps write to us, putting your case and including copies of the Order and of the Notices of proposal and making relating to it. I would remind you that the Secretary of State has reserve powers under Part 1 of Schedule 9 to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to revoke the 1962 Order, should he ultimately consider your actions unreasonable.

2/96. 3/1/96

GOVERNMENT CLOSE TO DISINTEGRATION SAYS MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is predicting an early General Election as a result of the "disintegration" of the Government. He said the flight of Devon Tory MP, Emma Nicholson, to the Liberal Democrats - coming after the Autumn defection of Stratford on Avon Tory MP, Alan Howarth, to Labour - shows the Government is in deep trouble.

In a New Year message to members of the Pendle Labour Party, the MP said:

"Tory MPs are taking to the life-rafts but I doubt if there is much the Prime Minister can do to steady the ship of state. People are crying out for a General Election and we stand ready to form the new Labour Government the country so desperately needs."

"The Conservatives are in complete disarray. At Westminster the Tory Government is still mired in sleaze and saddled with massively unpopular policies.

"Their policy on rail privatisation staggers from one crisis to the next. The privatised utilities are a constant source of embarrassment to the Government. First the drought and now the floods. And despite a penny off the standard rate of income tax, the vast majority of people say they will never trust the Tories on tax again. The broken promises on tax and VAT on fuel are remembered with burning resentment. The

Government is deeply unpopular and is fast running out time to turn things round.

“November’s Queen's Speech - setting out the legislative programme for this session of Parliament - was a lack-lustre affair. True, there are controversial elements such as the Asylum and Immigration Bill and the Housing Bill, but there is little else of real substance. Yet so much is crying out to be done.

“In 1995 we had yet more stories in the press about the scourge of low pay.
“There was the case I raised in Parliament of the Colne woman who was paid 15p an hour. We need to take firm action against such unscrupulous employers. We have also had further redundancies at Bairdtex in Trawden, Smith and Nephew, Carrington Viyella and others. We need a Government committed to work with manufacturing industry - supporting, helping, encouraging our local firms. When I look around at the devastation of our manufacturing industry it makes me want to work ever harder for a new Labour Government. One that will make changes and one that will make a difference.”

“In fact, we are now turning into the home straight. There is likely to be a General Election this year. The Prime Minister wants to hang on until the bitter end but the Grim Reaper may have other plans. The Tory majority in the Commons is shrinking fast and with further by election losses the Conservatives could lose their overall majority in the Commons, their legitimacy and, ultimately, their will to govern.”

“The election cannot come too soon for the people of Pendle.”

3/96. 3/1/96

MP TO MEET MINISTER TO PRESS FOR A FAIR DEAL FOR LANCASHIRE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining a delegation of Lancashire County councillors next Tuesday (9 January) to meet Local Government Minister, David Curry, in a bid to get a fair deal for Lancashire from this year’s local finance settlement. The package goes to the Commons later this month for approval.

The meeting, at the Environment Department’s Marsham Street Headquarters, will press the case for changing the way in which cash is allocated to councils nationwide.

The MP said: “County councils such as Hampshire and Kent in the South of England get a much better deal through a technical slight of hand known as the area cost adjustment which makes more money available for each primary and secondary student in schools down there. Lancashire consistently loses out. This has been a running sore for absolutely ages.”

“There is also the question of the Police Grant which is a matter of the greatest concern in Pendle where Barnoldswick’s police station could be relegated to part time status.”

“The Government is cutting back on public spending in areas that really matter while forcing councils to put up their Council Taxes way above inflation.”

4/96. 3/1/96

82 YEAR OLD MAN WINS MP’s BACKING IN FIGHT FOR COMPENSATION

John Lancaster, a 82 year old Nelson man, is battling bravely to get compensation after an accident four years ago at the new swimming pool in Colne. He says the delay in settling his claim is outrageous - and the area’s MP, Gordon Prentice, agrees.

The elderly Mr Lancaster of 6 Marlin Street, Nelson, injured his shoulder in the accident in March 1992 when he slipped on the tiling at the changing room end of the pool. Shortly afterwards the area surrounding the pool was re-tiled with non-slip tiles.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “Mr Lancaster is clearly at the end of his tether and I can well understand his frustration. The strain of it all is, I am sure, beginning to tell on him.”

In Mr Lancaster’s case, I have been in touch with his solicitors and with Pendle Council. The Council’s insurers are resisting this claim and two others and we seem to be in a state of legal grid-lock. I am told the insurance company believes the builders, Barnfield Construction, and the architects are at least partly responsible. The people who supplied the tiles also feature in this and the whole thing is bedevilled by claims and counter-claims. My elderly constituent is, of course, the loser in all this.”

“I have written to the Lord Chancellor to complain about the inordinate delay and I am told to expect a report on court delays in the summer -

by which time my constituent will be nearing his 83th birthday. I fully intend to raise the issue in Parliament. These delays are totally unacceptable."

Note to Editors: Mr Lancaster requested publicity.

5/96. 3/1/96

MP RENEWS CALL FOR GREATER ACCESS TO LAND

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says he is redoubling his efforts in 1996 to secure greater access to land. He is a vigorous campaigner for opening up the countryside - while preserving the legitimate rights of those who live and work there.

The MP said: "The local council has been doing a good job in publicising access and making people aware of their rights. Even so, constant vigilance is necessary. A constituent in Earby has recently drawn my attention to a public footpath near the town which has an electrified fence strung across it. This sort of thing is definitely not on."

"I am asking the council to take the necessary action to ensure the right of way is open and usable. People shouldn't have to be limbo dancers to use a public footpath."

Note to Editors: Last September, the Pendle MP was joined by Shadow Environment Secretary, Frank Dobson MP, at a rally to promote "Open Britain Day" at Penistone Hill Country Park near Haworth. The MPs and speakers from the Ramblers Association called for public access to moorland and open country.

The Pendle MP, whose constituency includes Boulsworth Hill, a ridge of rough moorland rising to 1700 feet where there is only limited access, is a firm champion of the right to roam across open land.

For Immediate Release. Number:6/96: Monday January 8, 1996

EQUAL TREATMENT WITH WESTMINSTER WOULD PROVIDE 6,037 EXTRA TEACHERS IN WESTMINSTER

"The Government won't allow the same amount of money for educating children here in Lancashire as it does for Tory Westminster. If schools in Lancashire were to do as well per pupil out of the Government's system as Westminster does, we could have 6,037 extra teachers next

year. Instead local schools face the prospect of fewer teachers and larger classes" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The shock figures were revealed today by Gordon Prentice MP, in advance of his Tuesday meeting with Local Government Minister, David Curry. The Pendle MP said:

"The Government is trying to claim it is providing extra money for education. That's simply not true. Instead the Conservatives have created a funding system which pours Government money into Tory Westminster at the expense of schools all over the country, including schools here in Lancashire."

"Nobody is suggesting that every school could get the same level of funding that Westminster is getting now – no Government could afford it. But the figure just shows that the education funding system is a fiddle. Only the Tories could believe that Westminster should benefit at the expense of everyone here in Lancashire."

For Immediate Release. Number: 7/96. Thursday 4 January 1996

MP CALLS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF WATER GRID

United Utilities (Previously North West Water) and Yorkshire Water - the two water companies serving Pendle - should be linked up as part of a national water grid says the area's MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the summer drought - and now the winter floods - demand fresh thinking and a new approach.

The MP said: "The Government has ridiculed the notion of a national water grid because of the huge sums involved. The National Rivers Authority puts the capital cost of a water grid at several billion pounds. Yet it could be constructed over time, dealing with the crisis areas first. This coupled with a new drive by the water companies to plug the leaky pipes is clearly the way forward."

"I recently asked the Environment Minister, James Clappison, for an estimate of the cost of constructing a mains pipeline into the Yorkshire Water area from an adjacent water authority area. Typically he dodged the issue by saying the cost of such a pipeline would depend on the length, the type of terrain to be crossed and whether there were suitable water treatment facilities to process the water. The Government is quick to see problems and slow to identify solutions."

“On 13 December - and not before time - Yorkshire Water announced a new programme estimated to cost around £50m to provide 35 miles of new pipeline and five new pumping stations to create a new east-west link from the Yorkshire Grid near Selby to the major conurbations of West Yorkshire. It is due for completion this summer.”

"This is the sort of capital spending that is required. And don’t let anyone say there isn’t any money to do the work. Here in Pendle, North West Water made £540 profit every minute of the day last year. And every minute they allowed 109,834,140 gallons of water to leak from their pipes. Yorkshire Water made £270 profit every minute of the day and allowed 72,107 gallons to leak out of their pipes every minute.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 8/96. Wed 10 January 96

MP SLAMS “TIGHT LIPPED” NORTH WEST WATER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted the privatised utility, North West Water, for its refusal to tell the National Rivers Authority (the statutory body responsible for ensuring water quality) how much it is budgeting to spend on carrying out vital improvements to the region’s water supplies and sewage treatment plants.

In the NRA’s newly published River Ribble Water Catchment Area Action Plan which sets out the works scheduled to be done each year up to 1999, the document states baldly: *“Throughout this section (on activity plans) please note that North West Water were asked to provide costs but were unwilling to provide figures for inclusion in the plan”*.

The Pendle MP said: “This simply isn't good enough and I have written to the Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, asking him why he is so reluctant to give us the figures. The plan sets out what the NRA considers needs to be done within the next five year period.”

“The installation of a phosphate removal plant at Barnoldswick Sewage Works is to be done by 1998 and that is to be welcomed. (Phosphates encourage the growth of algae which take oxygen out of the water and therefore harm fish). But the promised extension of the sewage works to increase capacity is down to be done some time in the indeterminate future with the cost listed as “unknown”.”

“On the vexed issue of Stocks Beck - which is too small a stream to take the treated outflow from the Barnoldswick Sewage Works - nothing is promised this side of the millennium. We still don’t have a start date.”

“We need the facts and we need the figures.”

Note to Editors: Following the on-site inspection in 1993 the Pendle MP said: "Stocks Beck is absorbing too many nitrates from agricultural use and this promotes the growth of algae. There are also problems with dyes getting into the water course turning it an unnatural shade. But, at the bottom of it all, is the Barnoldswick Sewage Works. They do an excellent job there but the works were really built in the wrong place. Stocks Beck is simply too small a stream to take the volume of treated effluent coming from the Sewage Works."

For Immediate Release. Number: 09/96. Tues 9 January 96

MAJOR HASN’T GOT THE MESSAGE SAYS PENDLE MP

The Prime Minister’s shock announcement on Sunday’s Breakfast with Frost programme that the privatisation of the Post Office could possibly feature in the next Conservative election manifesto has infuriated Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. John Major said: *“The Post Office would have been more efficient and able to expand services in the private sector.”*

The Pendle MP said: “This is enough to make me see pillar box red! The Post Office is efficient and makes a profit and only a tiny number of Conservative ideologues want to see it sold off. The Prime Minister’s approach is dogma driven, ignoring the dangers of rural areas losing their Post Offices and postage costs going through the roof to pay for shareholders’ profits and fat cat salaries.”

“In 1993 I had no fewer than 8,000 local people contact me either by letter or by way of the petition which I delivered to the Prime Minister in July of that year. Now he wants to resurrect this harebrained policy. When is he going to get the message?”

Note to Editors: By July 1993, one person in eight of Pendle's adult population of 65,000 had written to the Pendle MP or signed the petitions protesting about the Government's threat to local post offices. The petition, containing over 8,000 names, was handed in to 10 Downing Street that month.

On 18 May 1994 the President of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine, announced plans to sell 51% of the Royal Mail and Parcelforce to the private sector. The plan was subsequently abandoned.

For Immediate Release. Number: 10/96. 9 January 1996

MP GETS SHIRTY WITH MARKS AND SPARKS

Allegations made by Granada Television's "World in Action" on Monday night (8 January) that child labour was used to make clothing for Marks and Spencer use has shocked Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The award winning investigative programme claimed a Morrocan company supplying the leading UK retailer employed children in their early teens and used "Made in the UK" labels for merchandise originating in the North African country.

The Pendle MP said: "These serious allegations about child labour need to be thoroughly investigated. I have also today asked Michael Heseltine, the President of the Board of Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure that clothing sold in the UK which bears a "Made in the UK" label is actually manufactured here. It is simply staggering that a blue chip company such as M&S has carried stock purporting to be made here when it wasn't."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP represents a constituency with a long association with the textile and clothing industries. This month, Bairdtex of Trawden, which manufactures coloured woven fabric, closes down for good with the loss of 129 jobs. One of the company's main customers was Marks and Spencer. Coloured woven fabric is in future to be imported from overseas.

For Immediate Release. Number: 11/96. 9 January 1996

PENDLE MP RIDICULES TORY RE-LAUNCH

The Government's new year re-launch has been ridiculed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster on the day Parliament re-aasembled after the Christmas break, the MP said:

"The Prime Minister's Saatchi and Saatchi inspired newspaper ads telling us all how wonderful the Conservative Government is, has fallen flat. Why doesn't he try to answeer the following questions?

"Why has our country fallen from 13th to 18th in the World Prosperity League? Why is our country's share of world trade now at its lowest this century? Why has our country fallen to 21st in the international league for investment? Why is our country now 35th in the world education

league and, of the major European economies, why do we have the smallest percentage of young people in full time education?”

“Why do one in five of our country's working age households have no one earning a wage, and why does our country have a million fewer people in work than when John Major became Prime Minister? Why are 1 in 3 children in our country in poverty, compared to 1 in 10 in 1979? Why has our country, under the Tories, had the biggest tax rise in peacetime history? Why are typical families in our country paying £600 more in taxes than in 1992, when John Major promised taxes would fall year on year?”

“Why have more homes in our country been repossessed under the Conservatives, and why are more people suffering from negative equity, than ever before? Why, after 16 years of Conservative government, is our country 60 divided?

“The Tories' New Year 're-launch' shows how out of touch John Major's Government is from the economic realities facing ordinary people.”

Note to Editors: The Tories' claim that the UK has the lowest unemployment of any major European country, and that the UK has more of its people in jobs than any other major European econcmy.The truth is: The unemployment rate in the UK (8.2% in Oct 95) is higher than in the Netherlands (6.6% in Sept 95) , Luxembourg (4% in Oct 95), Portugal (7.1% in Oct 95~ and Denmark (6.1% in Sept 95). (Source: Eurostat December 1995)

Male unemployment in the UK (9.2% in Oct 95) is higher than in Belgium (8.3% in Oct 95), Germany (7.4% in Oct 95), Italy (8.9% in Oct 95), Luxernbourg (3.1% in Oct 95), the Netherlands (5.5% in Sept 95), Portugal (6.7% in Oct 95) and Denmark (5.6% in Sept 95). (Source: Eurostat Dec 1995)

• There are now 1.2 million fewer people with jobs than when John Major took office. (Source: CSO)

Over the period 1979-94, job growth in the UK has been lower than in ten other European countries: Netherlands, Austria, Greece, Portugal, Germany, Denmark, Luxembourg, France, Belgium and Italy. (Source: OECD Labour Force Statistics) Unemployment is more than double the level inherited by the Tories in 1979, and is 465,000 higher than when John Major became Prime Minister. (Source: CSO)

Inflation and Growth. The Tories' claim that the UK has the longest period of low inflation for 50 years. The truth is:

• The UK has the fifth highest inflation rate in Europe after Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece; 10 of the 15 EU states do better than the UK on inflation. (Source: CSO)

Between 1957 and 1967 prices rose by 32.5%, between 1985 and 1995 prices rose by over 55%. And between 1957 and 1967 GDP rose by 35%, between 1g85 and 1995 GDP rose by only 25%. (Source: Economic Trends, CSO)

• Average growth in the UK over 1979-93 has been the slowest of the 18 countries in the G7 and the EC. (Source: written parliamentary answers)

Tax. The Tories' claim that the UK now has the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years, and the lowest tax burden in Europe. The truth is:

In 1978/79 taxation took 34.75% of national income, next year the Exchequer will take 36.5% of national income. And the tax burden is forecast to rise each year until the end of the century - reaching 37.5% by the year 2000. (Source: FSBR)

On average, the Tories have taxed more heavily than any Labour administration: the average proportion of national income taken in taxes from 79-95 is 37%, from 74-79 it was 36%. (Source: written parliamentary answers)

• Kenneth Clarke has admitted that the tax rises since the last election have been equivalent to a 7p increase in the basic rate. (Source: Treasury Select Committee)

For Immediate Release. Number: 12/96. Wed 10 January 96

TORY MPs IN TURMOIL OVER THATCHER SPEECH

In the wake of renewed infighting within the Conservative Party, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, observed: “This morning, on the BBC Radio 4’s Today Programme, left wing Tory MP Patrick Cormack warned Margaret Thatcher not to factionalise the Conservative Party. Essex Tory MP Jerry Hayes urged Margaret Thatcher not to start"a further round of blood letting". By contrast, Ian Duncan-Smith highlighted the Tory lurch to the right saying that he hoped her speech would reaffirm her core Conservative beliefs.”

“The speech will come as yet another blow to Mr Major during a week in which North West MP Peter Thurnham announced he was considering standing as an independent candidate and then warned that he would not guarantee his loyalty in all votes: "I will take each issue on its merits .”

”John Major, clearly shaken by Labour's policy advances as his own party tears itself apart, is making a speech today attacking Tony Blair's vision of a stakeholder economy instead of governing the country.”

“Further evidence of Tory failure on the economy was published today. The balance of visible trade for October, at minus £1.7 billion is at its worst level since 1992. The Tories have eroded the manufacturing base to such an extent that Britain is too weak to pay its way in the international economy. Britain is importing more than it exports at a level not seen since 1992.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 13/96. Wed 10 January 1996

MP WELCOMES NEW STUDY ON RISKS OF LOW FLYING

Defence Minister, Nicholas Soames, has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that he is looking into the risks of a mid air collision involving military fast jets such as the Tornado. A year ago this month, eight Tornados flew across Barnoldswick and Earby on their return home to base in Bruggen, Germany.

The Pendle MP said: “I welcome the Government’s initiative in commissioning this study but it will only confirm what common sense already tells us. There should be a total ban on low flying by military aircraft over built up areas.”

The MP asked the Minister if he would calculate the statistical probability of a mid-air collision involving fast jets on exercise over the next twelve months. The Minister replied: “A study is being conducted by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency to assess the probability of a random mid-air collision between various types of aircraft operating in the United Kingdom Low Flying System.”

Prentice said: “In the last year Tornados have been lost after their wings clipped each other over the North Sea. In September 1994, a Tornado crashed into a hillside in Perthshire and it was a second away from a school playground with 16 children playing. There have been 17 Tornado crashes over land in the UK since 1981 and it is madness to court disaster by allowing these planes to fly over populated areas.”

Note to Editors: In a debate last April, the Pendle MP called on the Armed Forces Minister, Nicholas Soames, to stop warplanes flying over his constituency at rooftop height. Eight Tornados skimmed over Barnoldswick and Earby on 30 January.

For Immediate Release. Number: 14/96. Wed 10 January 96

THREE LIBERALS RULED OUT IN VOTE ON BUS SALE

Pleas by three Liberal members of Pendle Borough Council to be allowed to vote on the controversial plan to sell the council's 50% stake in the local bus company, Burnley and Pendle Transport, have fallen on deaf ears.

The councillors asked the Secretary of State for Transport for a special dispensation to be allowed to vote at the key council meeting scheduled for 31 January when the final decision is to be taken. All three requests, from Councillors Ian and Gill Gillespy and John David have been turned down.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I am surprised that applications for a dispensation were lodged with the Secretary of State. We have all been led to believe that everyone would act in a way that is beyond reproach. Now we find out that Ian Gilhespy, an employee of one of the main bidders, Stagecoach, actually wanted to vote on the issue and sought permission to do so!"

"Rumours are that Stagecoach is the favoured bidder yet they have been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission more times than I have had hot dinners. For the Liberals to flog off our bus company to that company would really take the biscuit. I urge them to think again even at this late hour. There is nothing wrong with admitting they've misjudged the public mood and made an appalling mistake."

Note to Editors: On 9 January, the Pendle MP asked Environment Minister, Sir Paul Beresford, about the applications for a dispensation to vote.

Mr Gordon Prentice (Lab - Pendle):

334 To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, which members of Pendle Council have sought a dispensation from him to vote on the

sale of Burnley and Pendle Transport, and to whom he proposes to grant such a dispensation and for what reasons.

Sir Paul Beresford

I have received such applications on behalf of Councillors Ian Gillespie and Gill Gillespie. Both applications to vote were declined having regard to our policy of granting such dispensations only in cases where either at least half of the Council or committee concerned would be otherwise disabled by pecuniary interests or where such disabilities would otherwise upset the elected party balance in the relevant Council or committee. My Rt Hon Friend, the Secretary of State for Transport, has granted an application for Councillor John David to vote at meetings of the authority's Policy Committee, but not of the full Council, having regard to his policy on councillor-directors of local authority - owned bus companies.

Tuesday 9 January 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 15/96. Wed 10 January 1996

MP WELCOMES RETEX CASH FOR THE NORTH WEST

More than £27 million in European funds for areas dependent on the textile industries is coming to the UK but Pendle MP Gordon Prentice has warned the Government it shouldn't be used an an excuse to cut back on central Government support for hard pressed areas traditionally dependent on textiles.

Today's confirmation from the European Union that cash help is coming to textile dependent areas was welcomed by the Pendle MP who has seen major local firms retrench or fold in recent months. Prentice said: "These funds will help us diversity and strengthen the economic base of the North West - provided there is no sleight of hand by the Government and we get the full £7m earmarked for the region."

Note to Editors: The RETEX programme has recently been extended until 1999 but funding has not yet been decided up until that date. RETEX is one of the Community Initiatives funded from the Structural Funds. Its aim is to promote the diversification of economic activity in areas heavily dependent on the textile and clothing industry. For the period 1994-1997 the UK will receive £27 million in European Grants. The North West will receive approximately £7 million.

In the North West applications for RETEX funding are processed through Lancashire Enterprise Ltd. For every EU grant allocated there will be some matching funds which range from 1% to 50% of the cost of the project. The main criteria is that the project is a project which will diversify industry away from textiles. A second criteria used is the areas status. The majority of matching funds are provided by local authorities but they are increasingly coming from the private sector. The RETEX Programme will cover for the first time areas in parts of London and The Scottish Borders.

Areas in the North West eligible for RETEX, 1994-1997 include the following Travel to Work Areas: Rochdale, Bolton and Bury, Oldham, Wigan and St- Helens, Pendle, Accrington and Rossendale, Burnley, Blackburn.

For Immediate Release. Number: 16/96. Thurs 11 January 1996

MP MAKES NEW BID TO KEEP POLICE STATION OPEN

The Police should abandon plans to reduce the opening hours of Barnoldswick Police Station says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP claims the situation has changed since the proposal was first floated last year. The issue is likely to come up again at the next meeting of the Pendle Police and Community Forum next Wednesday (17 January) at Brierfield.

The MP said: "Things have moved on and the Government has promised additional cash for Police Authorities around the country. The Home Office Minister David Maclean told me additional cash for Police Authorities would allow 5,000 extra police officers to be recruited over the next three years. He says this could mean an extra 28 officers in Lancashire this year."

"Last October, the Divisional Commander, Superintendent Peter Rawstrone, told the public meeting on the proposed cuts in opening hours that *"despite repeated requests there was no prospect of receiving any further officers now or in the foreseeable future"*. Clearly, the situation has changed. I am taking the Minister at his word. Here in Pendle people want more police and they want their police stations open round the clock."

"The annual policing plan produced by Lancashire Police Authority should, as a matter of course, flag up any controversial proposals."

Note to Editors: On 9 January, the Pendle MP asked Home Office Minister David Maclean if he would make it his policy to collect information centrally and on an annual basis on the number of police stations which have opened, closed and have had their opening hours curtailed. The Minister replied: "No. These are operational matters for chief constables in consultation with their police authorities where appropriate."

The Pendle MP raised the Barnoldswick Police Station issue in a debate in the Commons on 8 December. Copies of his speech are available from Office.

For Immediate Release. Number: 17/96. Mon 15 January 1996

TIME BILL "SHOULDN'T SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY" says MP

A move in the House of Commons this Friday (19 January) to put the nation's clocks forward by one hour throughout the year will be opposed by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Conservative MP, John Butterfill came top in the ballot of MPs to introduce a Private Members' Bill this session. He will be trying to muster support to get on the statute book his British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill. If carried into law, it would align Britain with the continent. Mornings would be darker longer and afternoons would be lighter.

The Pendle MP said: "If this measure goes through, it will still be dark in Inverness at 10am. If London were to be in darkness at 10 in the morning this Bill wouldn't see the light of day!"

"Children will be stumbling their way to school in darkness. Postal workers and others who have to rise early will be working by flashlight. And for the rest of the population there is the depressing psychological and physiological effects on getting up and starting the day in darkness."

"It is largely a winter issue with the days being longer and lighter in the summer. We would all like an extra hour of daylight on a winter's afternoon but not if it means a pitch black early morning."

Note to Editors: The last time when the clocks stayed on summertime all year round was during the period 1968-1971.

18/96 Mon 15 Jan 96

HARTLEY HOSPITAL SET BACK - MP "DEEPLY CONCERNED"

Reports that the Bradford and Northern Housing Association decided last spring to pull out of a joint venture to restore and convert the long closed Hartley Hospital into a nursing home have disturbed local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP, who raised the issue of the future of the cherished hospital in a debate in the Commons on 17 March 1994, said it was a matter of deep concern that the housing association had allegedly strung everyone along - giving the impression it had an interest while, in reality, having already made up its mind not to proceed.

"At the moment I only have press reports to go on but if they are accurate there is clearly some explaining to be done. I have written to Pendle Council's Chief Executive to ask for the council's version of events and I am in touch with Bradford and Northern also. I am determined the old hospital shouldn't become a casualty in all this."

Note to Editors: Hartley Hospital in Colne - left in perpetuity to the people of the town by the jam magnate, Sir William Pickles Hartley and empty since 1989 - was sold by the North West Regional Health Authority in 1994 to the builders and developers, Ribble Industrial Estates, for £325,000.

The MP was involved in a long running battle with the then chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority, Sir Bruce Martin, to get details of the sale price and to force the disclosure of the identity of the mystery purchasers. The RHA eventually relented. The MP also pressed for sight of the valuation report following claims that the hospital had been sold for a song. The valuation report was classified "confidential" and was not published.

19/96 15 Jan 96

FINANCE BILL "TOO HEAVY TO PICK UP" SAYS PRENTICE

The Finance Bill, which implements last November's Budget, is to be debated in the Commons today and is the third longest Finance Bill ever published says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP, who is a member of the Deregulation Select Committee charged with cutting red tape and lifting burdens on business, said: "The 1996 Finance Bill exposes the myth of Conservative rhetoric on tax simplification and deregulation. At 408 pages it is fully one third longer than last year's Bill and comes on top of the 1500 pages of primary tax legislation over the past five years. This is already double the volume of the first Thatcher administration. You need to be in A1 physical condition just to pick the thing up!"

"The public and businesses will find it simply incredible that a Government which expends so much energy talking about bureaucracy and business burdens should be enacting such a huge volume of extra legislation."

"The Finance Bill needs to be amended to crack down on executive share options while safeguarding the interests of wider share ownership for ordinary and lower paid employees such as the ASDA people in Colne and elsewhere. We also need to highlight the ticking time bomb of the new self assessment tax regime which is to be implemented in April next year. There will be extra costs and administrative burdens on businesses."

"And what has happened to the Greenbury proposals to force the disclosure in company accounts of the true costs of the extra pension entitlements awarded to themselves by the bosses of the privatised utilities? We must get a legal requirement to disclose written into the law."

20/96 Wed 17 Jan 96

PENDLE JOBLESS SHARPLY UP

The number of people out of work in Pendle in December and claiming benefit rose sharply to 2,034 from the November figure of 1,876 - an increase of 158. The unemployment rate is up from 5.1% to 5.5%. There were 1,592 men and 442 women looking for work. The Nelson Job Centre advertised 164 vacancies and Colne 95.

The Pendle MP said: "These figures are very disappointing but hardly surprising. And there are, unfortunately, further job losses in the pipeline. Job insecurity has become a modern plague. It visits every occupation and region. There has been an explosion in part time work. We have seen here in Pendle great abuses with wage rates touching third world levels. There is the scourge of long term unemployment."

“Today, the national unemployment figures fell to 2,236,000. There are still one million fewer jobs than when John Major took office. Unemployment seems to be bottoming out at 2.25 million although we can comfortably add some 900,000 - which is the likely effect of the 24 changes in the definition of unemployment.”

“Vacancies nationally advertised in Job Centres decreased by 3,400 in December. So the fall in unemployment does not represent people going back to work but people who are no longer eligible for benefit giving up on the job market.”

Note to Editors: The cost of unemployment in Pendle last month was £1,525,500. The cost of unemployment in Pendle since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990 now stands at £126,454,500.

For Immediate Release. Number: 23/96. Tues 16 January 1996

MP PLEDGES GUERRILLA TACTICS OVER FINANCE BILL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who is about to embark on a two month stint on the Committee Stage of the Finance Bill which puts November’s Budget into law, pledged a “guerrilla campaign” to highlight Tory economic failure.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: “The long committee stage allows the Opposition to conduct a war of attrition, springing legislative ambushes during the long hours of detailed debate on the Bill.”

“The Chancellor and the Prime Minister repeatedly claim the UK is the 'enterprise capital of Europe'. Kenneth Clarke used the phrase five times in his Budget speech. However, he neglects to mention that the UK currently has the 2nd slowest growth in Europe and the 5th highest inflation rate.”

“Look at the legacy the Conservatives are leaving us. Under this Government the UK has slumped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league. Over the last five years (Dec'90 to Sept'95) over 1 million jobs have been lost and currently one in five households of working age has nobody in work. Out of the 24 OECD countries over the period 1979-93 the UK invested the smallest proportion of National Income. In terms of investment per head of population, currently the UK is 11th in the EU behind countries such as Italy, Portugal and Spain.”

“How can the UK be the enterprise capital of Europe when it had a £6 billion trade deficit with the EU in 1994? The recent £1.7 billion trade deficit with all countries in October was the worst since December 1992. The Tories have had to raise taxes to pay the price of economic failure with a typical family paying more than £600 a year more in taxes since 1992.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 24/96. Tues 16 January 1996

PENDLE HOMEOWNERS FEEL THE BLAST

Pendle homeowners, living in an area with one of the highest rates of home ownership in the country, have been betrayed by the Conservative Government says local MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster, he said three more examples of economic failure confirmed the bleak outlook.

The MP said: “The collapse of the housing market is the result of the Government’s record mortgage rates before the last election because growth became unsustainable. The Government then went on to cut mortgage tax relief in April 1994 after promising to maintain it. Now people receive no help with their housing payments for the first two months of unemployment and only a fraction of the costs for the following four months. The number of households in negative equity has risen from 1.12 million at the end of the third quarter last year to 1.16 million at the end of 1995. The Government have betrayed homeowners in Pendle.”

“All this is borne out by yesterday's report from the Treasury Committee. It casts doubt on the Chancellor’s forecasts for growth, investment and the housing market. The Committee warned that stronger growth could not be sustained without pushing up inflation, reinforcing Labour's argument that growth under the Conservatives is unsustainable.”

“To cap it all, one thousand six hundred jobs will be axed in Kenneth Clarke’s constituency by Scottish and Newcastle breweries. He is unable to prevent this evidence of failure on his own doorstep.”

“Living standards are still falling. Real personal disposable income in the 3rd quarter of 1995 (the latest figures available) was 0.6 % lower than at the start of 1995. It is no surprise there is no feelgood factor.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 25/96. Wed 17 January 1996

MP BACKS MOVE TO OUTLAW CRUELTY TO MAMMALS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a Private Member's Bill to be debated next Friday (26 January) which will outlaw cruelty to wild animals. The MP says that in the present state of the law thugs can quite legally kick, beat or burn wild animals to death, or throw them alive on fires or nail them to trees. "This kind of unspeakable cruelty should be against the law."

The MP said: "In the past Parliament has banned bear and bull baiting. dog fighting, cock-fighting and badger baiting. But other animals too require our protection and we should give it."

"Alan Meale's new Bill is John McFall's Bill as amended in Commons' Committee. At the last hurdle it was sabotaged by the pro-hunt lobby of MPs and Peers. The British Field Sports Society (BFSS) said they were happy with the McFall Bill if the clauses relating to hunting and snaring were removed. But when that was done they still found fault with it! Anyone who objects to cruelty should have no difficulty in supporting the new Bill."

Note to Editors: The following briefing on Alan Meale's Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill has been prepared by the League Against Cruel Sports:

The Protection of Animals Act 1911 (1912 in Scotland) is the main instrument of British animal protection. However, it applies only to 'domestic' and 'captive' animals. Judicial decisions exist which make it clear that 'captive' animals are generally those which are living in 'captivity' such as animals in zoos. and not wild animals which for example have been captured or cornered during hunting. trapping or snaring

The only wild mammal specifically protected from cruelty in Britain is the badger - first protected under the Badgers Act 1973 which has been enhanced several times by Parliament to increase penalties. close loop-holes and provide for the protection of badger setts. all such improvements have now been amalgamated into the Protection of Badgers Act 1992

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, there are a handful of wild mammals totally protected because they are endangered as a species, eg, otters, bats, red
squirrels, pine martens, dolphins. Under the same Act there are a number of methods which are totally prohibited (self-locking snares, crossbows etc) and some methods which are prohibited (any snare,

spring traps, etc) for the taking or killing of certain 'vulnerable' species such as hedgehogs. There are also various laws which prohibit the use of snares to take deer, killing hares on Sundays and game laws to deal with the poaching of deer, hares and rabbits. However there is no legislation which generally prohibits cruelty on wild mammals.

Kevin McNamara's Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill which received huge public and political support before its narrow defeat at Second Reading on February 14th 1992, produced the opportunity to debate and consider problems perceived by various interest groups. For instance, its first Clause would have made it an offence to 'intentionally inflict unnecessary suffering onto any wild mammal'. This worried many in the farming community who were concerned that indulging in normal pest control could lead to farmers being persecuted and prosecuted by 'animal rights' groups.

John McFall's version of the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, presented with all-party support in the last Parliamentary session, took such worries into account with a new Clause one, to outlaw the cruel kicking, beating or torture of any wild mammal - three specific offences in respect of domestic animals in the Protection of Animals Act 1911. Even with other Clauses included to outlaw hunting with dogs and the unlicensed use of snare, the Bill was passed at Second Reading on March 3rd 1995, by a vote of 253 to nil.

John McFall's Bill reached Committee Stage with only a few days of Private Members Business left. In an effort to make progress Mr McFall and his sponsors. with the support of leading animal welfare societies offered to drop the anti-hunting and snaring clauses. Despite earlier assurances that they supported Clause one, pro-hunting MPs raised objections to the word 'torture' on the grounds that courts might be persuaded that hunting or snaring could be interpreted as 'torture'.

Hasty negotiations took place with the assistance of the Government and. following consideration by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. final agreement was achieved on wording which would have made it an offence to cruelly kick beat impale crush burn or drown any wild mammal In this form the Bill received an unopposed Report and Third Reading.

Pro-hunting Peers were able to use the very limited time available to the Bill following the Summer recess to table wrecking amendments on the grounds that the new wording provided by a Government Department was flawed; for example, they sought to introduce an exemption clause for people involved in blood sports. The Bill's sponsors accepted all these unnecessary amendments to ensure it

completed its passage through the Lords. Regrettably, the leader of the House, despite requests from his Shadow, refused to make time available for Commons Consideration of Lords Amendments. The Bill fell.

Alan Meale's new Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill is the same Bill that the House of Commons passed last Summer - before the Lords' wrecking amendments.

For Immediate Release. Number: 26/96. Wed 17 January 1996

BARLICK NICK TO STAY OPEN - OFFICIAL

Barnoldswick Police Station - which was threatened with downgrading to part-time status - is to stay open round the clock. After months of uncertainty, the Divisional Police Commander, Superintendent Peter Rawstrone told a meeting of the Pendle Police and Community Forum this evening (17 January) that plans to cut the opening hours of the police station were to be abandoned.

Speaking at Westminster after he heard the news this evening, a delighted Mr Prentice said: “Everyone in West Craven will be thrilled to bits. Superintendent Rawstrone is to be congratulated on this decision which reflects the view of the overwhelming majority of local people.”

“There is still the issue of getting more police out on the beat and that is something which still has to be addressed. I hope the Lancashire Police Authority will now be in a position to recruit the additional police officers promised by the Home Office Minister, David Maclean, last November.”

ends

Note to Editors: The Home Office Minister David Maclean told the Pendle MP in a letter on 30 November that sufficient additional cash for Police Authorities was to be made available which would allow 5,000 extra police officers to be recruited over the next three years. The Minister said this could mean an extra 28 officers in Lancashire this year.

For Immediate Release. Number: 27/96.EMBARGO 22 Jan 1996

MP PLEDGES NO PACTS AND NO DEALS WITH LIB DEMS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says there will be no pacts and no deals with the Liberal Democrats after the next General Election. He told Peter Kellner of BBC TV's Newsnight there would be a riot in the Parliamentary Labour Party if there was any suggestion of Paddy Ashdown getting a place in a Labour Cabinet in exchange for some kind of formal understanding.

The MP said the Liberal Democrats were difficult to pin down - appealing to a wide constituency of interests, saying one thing to one person and the complete opposite to another. "Labour will be putting its own manifesto to the nation at the General Election. It will be a popular programme which will have broad appeal. Talk of post election pacts is wide of the mark."

"Even at Westminster the Liberal Democrats look both ways. Some, such as Simon Hughes, voting to ban fox hunting and others, like Alex Carlisle, saying they would go to the stake to retain it. At local level, this is magnified. In Pendle, the message the local Liberal Democrats send out is often distorted or exaggerated. They claim credit where it is not due and they never take responsibility for things that go wrong."

On Monday Paddy Ashdown is billed as giving a "keynote lecture" (Independent 18 January) on a "post election agreement to work with Labour".

Note to Editors: BBC Newsnight will be covering the issue in its programme on Monday 22 January at 10.30pm.

For Immediate Release. Number: 28/96. Fri 19 January 1996

THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT says MP

A move in the House of Commons to put the nation's clocks forward by one hour throughout the year was defeated today. In a vote, the sponsors of the British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill failed to get the required 100 MPs to allow the Bill to progress through to the next stage.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, was delighted. "This Bill should never have seen the light of day in the first place."

"People living in London or on the south coast would have gained 'more daylight' than they lost. For someone living in Bournemouth - such as the sponsoring Conservative MP - there would have been 48

extra days in the year when sunset was as late as 5.30pm - but only 38 when sunrise was 9am or later."

"By contrast, people living in the north and north west of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would have lost out badly. In Glasgow, for example, there would have been 36 longer evenings but 81 darker mornings."

"There is no time like the present" quipped the MP.

Note to Editors: The last time when the clocks stayed on summertime all year round was during the period 1968-1971.

For Immediate Release. Number: 29/96. Fri 19 January 1996

MP SLATES NURSERY VOUCHER SCHEME

The Bill to bring in nursery vouchers arrives in the Commons on Monday (22 January). The Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Bill paves the way for the national implementation of the nursery voucher scheme; and allows grant-maintained schools to borrow commercially against their assets.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "These vouchers are a complete and utter waste of time. Where there is no place, there is no choice. The Government has consistently refused to offer the guarantee of a place to the parents of four year olds. Without a place, the voucher is not worth the paper that it is written on."

"The voucher scheme has everything to do with the delivery of a right-wing agenda and nothing to do with the delivery of a quality nursery education for the nation's children."

"The Labour Party wants to see all three and four year old whose parents want it have access to quality nursery education. We will use the £185 million of new money pledged to the voucher scheme to provide a guarantee of a place for four year olds. We will set targets to extend that entitlement to the three year olds currently excluded from the Government's scheme."

"Labour in Government will build on current provision, working with all the partners in pre-school education - LEAs, playgroups, private and voluntary sector providers - to ensure a planned expansion of provision to meet the needs of local communities."

ends

Note to Editors: Parents of four year olds are to be issued with a £1,100 voucher to redeem for a part-time nursery place or a full-time reception class place in a
primary school (which is already available for the vast majority of 4 year olds in the maintained sector); or as much provision in the private or voluntary sectors as the £1,100 will purchase. The vouchers will be issued and redeemed by a private company, Capita Managed Services Ltd. Of the £730 million pledged to the scheme, "about" £548 million is to be clawed back from local authority spending on under-fives' services; £185 million of ~new money" will be channelled through the voucher company - £20 million of which will be spent on administration and inspection.

The pilot phase in four local authorities - Wandsworth, Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, Norfolk - will begin in April 1996; the national scheme is due to operate from April 1997.

Gillian Shephard has gone on the record against vouchers. She told the Independent: "I must say I am very conscious of the~unwieldy nature of vouchers. You don't want the machinery to overshadow the policy." (19.10.94). In April '95, Shephard told the TES: "vouchers are not the favoured option." (7.4.95)

Three year olds excluded & current provision under-mined. The voucher scheme is aimed only at four year olds, 91% of whom already had a place at January 1994. Nothing is offered to three year olds, only 45% of whom had a place at January 1994.

For Immediate Release. Number: 30/96. Tues 23 January 1996

MPs CALL FOR BUS SALE TO BE REFERRED TO MMC

Local MPs Gordon Prentice and Peter Pike tonight called for the proposed sale to Stagecoach of Pendle Council's 50% stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport to be referred to the competition watchdog body, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said tonight: "Stagecoach is getting a stranglehold on the British bus industry. They are taking over anything and everything that moves. Out of the 15 enquiries into the bus industry carried out by the MMC no fewer than eight involved Stagecoach."

“The guarantees are worse than useless. Routes preserved for twelve months and then what? Stagecoach is prepared to pay £2m for Pendle’s 50% but £5.7m for the whole shooting match, the entire company, - provided they get a nod and a wink from the Office of Fair Trading saying it won’t recommend a reference to the MMC. Where does that put the other bidders?”

“We constantly hear this incantation from the Liberals about listening to the community. Yet we have a colossal petition with the names of 13,000 local people who are against the sale and it is completely disregarded. The Liberals are behaving in an absolutely disgraceful way.”

Note to Editors: Three Liberal councillors, Ian Gilhespy (who works for Stagecoach), the Mayor of Pendle, Gillian Gilhespy, and John David are all disqualified from voting on the sell-off motion when it comes before the meeting of the full council on 31 January.

The following Early Day Motion, tabled by Pendle MP Gordon Prentice and Burnley MP Peter Pike, will appear on the Order Paper of the Commons tomorrow (24 January)

STAGECOACH AND BURNLEY AND PENDLE TRANSPORT

This House notes that the Policy Committee of Liberal controlled Pendle Borough
Council is to meet on 24 January to consider a report recommending the sale for £2 million of the council’s 50% stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport, a bus company jointly owned with Burnley Council, to the predatory company Stagecoach which has a significant presence already in Lancashire and the North West, notes that Burnley and Pendle Transport makes a healthy profit year on year and pays dividends to both councils; further notes that the council company’s pre tax profit margin in 1994 was higher than 14 out of the 20 remaining municipal bus companies and that it is an efficient and effective operation; condemns the cavalier disregard by the Liberals of the huge petition of 13,000 local people opposed to the sale, fears that an acquisition by Stagecoach will open the way for further predatory bids for the remaining municipal bus companies in East Lancashire and believes the issue should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the grounds that the purchase by Stagecoach would not promote competition, would reduce services and would be against the public interest.

For Immediate Release. Number: 31/96. Tues 23 January 1996

PENDLE MP STEPS UP CALL FOR ACCESS TO LAND

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining ramblers on forbidden moorland in the Pennines west of Sheffield to highlight the ten minute rule Bill - the Access to Countryside Bill - which is to be introduced in the Commons by Paddy Tipping MP on Tuesday 30 January. The Pendle MP is one of the Bill's sponsors.

The gathering will take place at 10am on Monday 29th January at a "KEEP OUT" sign on Strines Moor in the Upper Derwent Valley. The Pendle MP will be joining Paddy Tipping and local ramblers to illustrate the injustice of being banned from huge areas of open, uncultivated countryside.

Prentice said: "Paddy tells me the owner of this moor has been approached many times in the past ten years in an attempt to get it opened to the public but the pleas have fallen on deaf ears. Now the Ramblers Association has stepped in to help publicise what has been going on."

"We have had the same problem here in the North West. I am grateful for the support of MPs and others such as the Ramblers Association to get vast tracts of Lancashire opened up. I am very happy to support Padding Tipping in his neck of the woods."

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 32/96. Tues 23 January 1996

PENSIONERS BELOW THE POVERTY LINE CLAIMS REPORT

A report by the Retirement Income Inquiry published tonight claims that over half a million pensioners have an income below the Government's current poverty line. In another shock statistic, over half a million pensioners have an income below 20% of male average earnings - the level of the basic pension in 1979.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "These statistics highlight the plight of so many of our elderly people. And millions of people in the workforce today face the prospect of retiring into poverty.

“The value of the basic pension has fallen dramatically over the years following the Government's decision in 1980 to increase it in line with prices rather than with earnings. During the last Labour Government in the late seventies, the basic pension's value was 20% of male average earnings. In the early 1990s it had dropped to 15% and by the year 2020 it will be worth less than 9%. If the earnings link had been kept then a married couple would now be over £30 per week better off and a single person almost £20 per week better off.”

“A person's pension should be both secure and adequate enough to ensure there is no poverty in old age. The basic State Pension should be the basis for that security in retirement.”

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 33/96. Wed 24 January 1996

GIVE THE ANIMALS A BREAK says MP

Animals should no longer be classified as “agricultural products” by the Treaty of Rome. They should be given a new status as “sentient beings” recognising that animals are living creatures capable of feeling pain and suffering says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was speaking at Westminster today at the launch of a new camplaign by “Compassion in World Farming” which aims to give animals a new status with animal welfare being given a higher profile in the European Union.

Gordon Prentice said: “I support moves to get the Treaty of Rome amended to define farm animals as 'sentient creatures'. At present all live animals, fish, crustaceans, molluscs, birds' eggs and parts of animals are defined as 'agricultural products'. It is widely believed that this definition hinders attempts to get improvements in animal welfare such as transport regulations, rearing systems such as Veal Crates and Sow Stalls, and the general attitude of the Commission to animal welfare.”

“The Labour Party believes in aiming for the highest possible standards when dealing with animals and we would welcome legislation that treats the animal population in a manner appropriate to civilised values. We want the Government to support this change in the Inter Governmental Conference later this year.”

Note to Editors: Photo of Gordon Prentice MP with Joanna Lumley, the patron of CIWF's campaign to secure the new status, will follow.

For Immediate Release. Number: 34/96. Wed 24 January 1996

HARRIET SHOULD THINK AGAIN says PENDLE MP

Opposition Shadow Health Spokesperson, Harriet Harman, who is at the centre of a boiling controversy over the choice of school for her son should think carefully about her position says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster at lunchtime today after the weekly meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the MP said: "There was a frank and very even tempered exchange of views. Harriet explained her position and the arguments were aired both for and against. My own view is that Harriet must do what she believes is right for her family. But she owes a duty and a responsibility to the wider party as a prominent member of the Shadow Cabinet. People in private life can make private decisions. Those in public life face more difficult decisions especially when they are elected to speak on behalf of others. Many people doubt whether this can simply be regarded as a "purely personal matter."

"Harriet will no doubt reflect on the damage that will be done if the charge of hypocrisy sticks - as it might. The Tories will relentlessly home in on the issue in the hope it will obscure the failings of the education system they have created."

"After 16 years of systematic withdrawal of funds from schools by the Tory government, even John Major has been forced to admit that the Tories have failed 85% of the nation's children. Labour's policy on academic selection remains unchanged. We remain opposed to academic selection by either interview or examination. In government Labour will act swiftly to improve standards in schools. Education will become - as Tony Blair has pledged - "a passion" of the next Labour Government."

"At the end of the day, Harriet must decide what is best for her family and for the Labour Party. It is a decision only she can make."

For Immediate Release. Number: 35/96. Thurs 25 January 1996

LOW PAY: UK WORSE OFF THAN THE POOREST IN EUROPE

The President of the Board of Trade has told Pendle MP Gordon Prentice there are millions of people in the UK who get paid less than the national minimum wage paid in other European countries. The MP wanted to know how many people in full-time employment in the United Kingdom earn less than the minimum hourly wage rates in each country of the European Union. The MP represents one of the UK's low pay blackspots

The Pendle MP said: "These figures show just how badly off we are in the UK compared with our continental neighbours. There are over 6 million people in Britain who earn less than the national minimum wage in Belgium. And there are over 290,000 of our citizens who earn less than the Spanish minimum wage. These figures show we are well on the way to becoming the poor cousin in the European family of nations."

Note to Editors: DTI Minister, John Taylor, gave the following details:

Country	National minimum hourly wage (stg)	Number of full-time workers in GB earning less than the minimum hourly wage rates (millions)
Belgium	5.46	6.19
France	4.84	4.78
Greece	1.82	0.27
Luxembourg	5.51	6.31
Netherlands	5.04	5.24
Portugal	1.30	0.15
Spain	2.00	0.29

Note: Derived from the Labour Force Survey - Summer 1995.

For Immediate Release. Number: 36/96. Thurs 25 January 1996

MPs ARE GOING TO THE DOGS!

BBC TV's "Scrutiny" will be taking a close look at the work of the Deregulation Select Committee in its programme on Saturday 27th January 1996 at 7.30pm on BBC 2.

Scrutiny follows a group of MPs as they journey from Walthamstow Dog Track to Whitby Fish Market in their quest to rid the country of red tape.

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice and Burnley MP Peter Pike are both members of the select committee.

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 37/96. Thurs 25 January 1996

HOUSING BILL BLIND TO HOUSING CRISIS says MP

"The Government is ignoring the problems faced by people buying their homes and making things worse for people renting and for people looking for somewhere decent to live" says Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

The MP was speaking at Westminster ahead of Monday's second reading debate on the Housing Bill (29 January). The MP said: "The Government's new Housing Bill does little or nothing to solve the housing crisis here in Pendle and elsewhere in the North West. The Bill does nothing to help home-owners - nothing for families here having trouble paying their mortgage or in negative equity or threatened with repossession."

"Since the Tories got in, the number of homeless people has doubled. At the same time the number of council houses being built has plummeted. For every council house being built today, the last Labour Government was building 41. In the entire North West region only 3 (three) new council houses were started in 1994! In the North West in 1979 there were 7,130 homeless people. That was far too many then but the figure now is 18,350. Homeowners did not escape unscathed. From 1990-94, 79,345 mortgage repossession actions were taken in the North West. A chilling statistic of mortage misery for sao many families."

"That's not all. The Bill will leave homeless families in endless insecurity. The Government is making it easier for landlords to evict tenants who owe as little as two months' rent. They are doing next to nothing to improve conditions for people forced to live in dangerous multi-occupied homes."

Note to Editors: The Bill contains nothing to help the 1 million families suffering with negative equity (51,000 in the North West). It

contains nothing to help the 250,000 families in serious mortgage arrears. It contains nothing to help the 1,000 families every week having their homes repossessed. It contains nothing to restore confidence in the housing market

more follows

HOUSING BILL BLIND TO HOUSING CRISIS says MP

Last year 122,660 households in England and Wales were accepted as homeless - more than double the figure since 1979. Instead of building more homes, the Government will make matters worse. At present local authorities are required to find permanent accommodation for priority categories. The Bill proposes instead that local authorities will be required to find temporary accommodation for families and vulnerable individuals, leaving them insecure and exploited.

The Bill proposes to change the law to make it easier for landlords to evict tenants who owe as little as two months' rent. It also proposes no effective action to improve the conditions for people forced to live in squalid and dangerous multi-occupied properties.

Still no money for council house building. The Bill proposes to downgrade even further the role of local authorities~in providing social housing.

The Bill proposes providing grants of between £8,000 and £16,000 to Housing Association tenants to buy their home and would require Housing Associations to extend a Right to Buy to all new tenants. Housing Associations will be required to invest the takings in building new houses while the Government continues to prevent councils doing the same thing.

The Conservative Record: The Tories like to portray themselves as the Party of the home-owner, but in reality they are nothing of the sort. In fact the last Labour Government had a much better record than the Tories on repossessions, mortgage arrears and housebuilding.

During the period of the last Labour Government -

* the annual number of housing repossessions fell below 3,000 and had fallen for three consecutive years before the Tories took office

* the number of homeowners with mortgage arrears of more than 6 months almost halved - to below 10,000 in 1979, 54,727 council and new town dwellings were started in England - 64,794 in Great Britain

The Tories have never matched this record of success for home-owners -

* last year almost 50,000 homes were repossessed and the number is rising - 17 repossessions now for every repossession with Labour

* last year 133,700 homeowners were more than 6 months in arrears with their mortgage and a further 117,100 had arrears of more than a year 25 families in serious mortgage arrears now for every 1 with Labour

* last year more than 1 in 50 homeowners was more than 6 months in arrears. More than 1 in 100 had arrears of more than a year.

* last year only 404 council and new town dwellings were started in England, 1,590 in Great Britain. In other words, for every 1 council home started in England last year, 135 were started when Labour was last in power. For Great Britain as a whole, the proportion is 41 council homes started when Labour was last in power for every 1 home last year

For Immediate Release. Number: 38/96. Thurs 25 January 1996

MP RE-ELECTED TO CHAIR KEY LABOUR COMMITTEE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, was re-elected today to the chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Backbench Environment Committee. The Committee has a wide-ranging brief which includes local government, planning and countryside issues.

The MP said: "I am delighted to have been re-elected by my colleagues to chair this Committee which has so many topical and controversial issues to consider. We will be examining a wide range of pressing environmental issues over the coming months and we will also be looking at the work of the new Environment Agency which gets to work in April."

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 39/96. Mon 29 Jan 1996

WHERE ARE THE SPECIALS?

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been making enquiries into the number of special constables in the Lancashire Police Service. After the furore over the recent threatened move to part time status for the police station at Barnoldswick the MP has been looking at ways to beef up force numbers.

In Lancashire there are 594 specials and 3,194 regular officers. The specials form 18.6% of the regular force compared with a massive 37.6% in Devon and Cornwall. Next door in North Yorkshire there are 359 specials and 1,310 regulars with the specials forming 27.4% of the regular strength. On this measure Lancashire ranks 23 out of 43 police forces in England and Wales (with 1 the most and 43 the fewest) and North Yorkshire 8 out of 43.

Lancashire has 2.1 specials per 5,000 population (rank 17 out of 43) and North Yorkshire 2.5 (rank 12 out of 43).

The Pendle MP prised the figures out of Home Office Minister David Maclean. The MP wanted to know the number of special constables in each police force in England and the ratio of specials to full-time police officers and to the population of the force area.

The Pendle MP commented: “I know the Lancashire Police Force is keen to recruit more specials and we need to encourage people to put their names forward. But why there should be such an enormous difference between the number of specials in, say, Suffolk or Staffordshire and Lancashire is a bit of a mystery. I am looking for clues which will give me the answer.”

“I want Ministers to spell out what they are doing to encourage more people to join up and make this valuable contribution to their local community.”

Table follows:

Where are the Specials?

Police Force	(a) Specials	(b) Regulars	(c) %	(d) (Pop. OOO's)	(e) per 5K
Avon & Somerset	676	2,986	22.6	1,456	2.3
Bedfordshire	196	1,116	17.6	543	1.8
Cambridgeshire	264	1,254	21.1	688	1.9
Cheshire	269	1,950	13.8	976	1.4
City of London	81	869	9.3	5	81.0

Cleveland	204	1,429	14.3	560	1.8
Cumbria	221	1,143	19.3	490	2.3
Derbyshire	440	1,762	25.0	954	2.3
Devon Cornwall	1,079	2,871	37.6	1,530	l.9
Dorset	230	1,272	18.1	672	1.7
Durham	192	1,376	14.1	608	1.6
Dyfed-Powys	304	977	31.1	473	3.2
Essex	548	2,897	18.9	1,497	1.8
Gloucestershire	330	1,141	28.9	550	3.0
Grter Manchester	749	7,026	10.7	2,578	1.5
Gwent	129	1,006	12.8	462	1.4
Hampshire	549	3,307	16.6	1,730	1.6
Hertfordshire	307	1,704	18.0	853	1.8
Humberside	380	2,024	18.8	890	2.1
Kent	598	3,099	19.3	1,546	1.9
Lancashire	594	3,194	18.6	1,424	2.1
Leicestershire	334	1,860	18.0	917	1.8
Lincolnshire	311	1,164	26.7	606	2
Merseyside	349	4,536	7.7	1,434	1.2
Metropolitan	1,657	27,395	6.0	7,455	1.1
Norfolk	325	1,391	23.4	769	2.1
Northampton	298	1,160	25.7	595	2.5
Northumbria	479	3,610	13.3	1,442	1.7
North Wales	323	1,351	23.9	658	2.5
North Yorkshire	359	1,310	27.4	727	2.5
Nottinghamshire	534	2,314	23.1	1,031	2.6
South Wales	469	2,954	15.9	1 330	1.8
South Yorkshire	423	3,041	13.9	1,305	1.6

Staffordshire	687	2,190	31.4	1,054	3.3
Suffolk	419	1,158	36.2	649	3.2
Surrey	241	1,656	14.6	774	1.6
Sussex	514	3,020	17.0	1,449	1.8
Thames Valley	764	3,759	20.3	2,017	1.9
Warwickshire	351	982	35.7	496	3.5
West Mercia	587	2,007	29.2	1,116	2.6
West Midlands	849	7,078	12.0	2,628	1.6
West Yorkshire	783'	5,122	15.3	2,104	1.9
Wiltshire	259	1,236	21.0	588	2.2
Total		19,655		124,697	51,629

(a) Number of special constables in post at 30 September 1995
(b) Number of regular officers in post at 30 September 1995
(c) Special constables as an equivalent percentage of regular officers
(d) Population of police force area at 30 June 1994 (in OOOs)
(e) Number of special constables per five thousand head of population

Police		a	b	c	d	e	rank
						as % of pop 5K	as %of regs
Devon Cornwall	1079	2871	37.6	1530	1.9	1	
Suffolk		419	1158	36.2	649	3.2	2
Warwickshire	351	982	35.7	496	3.5	3	
Staffordshire	687	2190	31.4	1054	3.3	4	
Dyfed-Powys	304	977	31.1	473	3.2	5	
West Mercia	587	2007	29.2	1116	2.6	6	
Gloucestershi	330	1141	28.9	550	3	7	
North Yorkshe359	1310	27.4	727	2.5	8		
Lincolnshire	311	1164	26.7	606	2.6	9	
Northampton	298	1160	25.7	595	2.5	10	
Derbyshire	440	1762	25	954	2.3	11	
North Wales	323	1351	23.9	658	2.5	12	
Norfolk	325	1391	23.4	769	2.1	13	
Nottinghamshi	534	2314	23.1	1031	2.6	14	
Avon & Somer	676	2986	22.6	1456	2.3	15	
Cambridgeshi	264	1254	21.1	688	1.9	16	
Wiltshire	259	1236	21	588	2.2	17	

Thames Valley	764	3759	20.3	2017	1.9	18	
Kent		598	3099	19.3	1546	1.9	19
Cumbria	221	1143	19.3	490	2.3	20	
Essex		548	2897	18.9	1497	1.8	21
Humberside	380	2024	18.8	890	2.1	22	
Lancashire	594	3194	18.6	1424	2.1	23	23
Dorset		230	1272	18.1	672	1.7	24
Leicestershire	334	1860	18	917	1.8	25	
Hertfordshire	307	1704	18	853	1.8	26	
Bedfordshire	196	1116	17.6	543	1.8	27	
Sussex		514	3020	17	1449	1.8	28
Hampshire	549	3307	16.6	1730	1.6	29	
South Wales	469	2954	15.9	1330	1.8	30	
West Yorkshi	783	5122	15.3	2104	1.9	31	
Surrey		241	1656	14.6	774	1.6	32
Cleveland	204	1429	14.3	560	1.8	33	
Durham	192	1376	14.1	608	1.6	34	
South Yorkshi	423	3041	13.9	1305	1.6	35	
Cheshire	269	1950	13.8	976	1.4	36	
Northumbria	479	3610	13.3	1442	1.7	37	
Gwent		129	1006	12.8	462	1.4	38
West Midlands	849	7078	12	2628	1.6	39	
Grter Manches	749	7026	10.7	2578	1.5	40	
City of London	81	869	9.3	5	81	41	
Merseyside	349	4536	7.7	1434	1.2	42	
Metropolitan	1657	27395		6	7455	1.1	43

(a) Number of special constables in post at 30 September 1995

(b) Number of regular officers in post at 30 September 1995

(c) Special constables as an equivalent percentage of regular officers

(d) Population of police force area at 30 June 1994 (in OOOs)

(e) Number of special constables per five thousand head of population

For Immediate Release. Number: 40/96. Mon 29 Jan 1996

CRUNCH VOTE LOOMS ON BUS SELL OFF

Liberal controlled Pendle Council in North East Lancashire is to vote this Wednesday (31 January) to sell its 50% stake in the municipal bus company, Burnley and Pendle Transport, to the controversial rapidly expanding private sector bus operator, Stagecoach, for £2m. The

proposed sale has been fiercely contested by the Council's Labour Group and also by Labour controlled Burnley Council which owns the other half. An unprecedented 13,000 name petition has been handed in to Pendle Council listing local people who are against the sell-off.

The area's two Labour MPs, Gordon Prentice and Peter Pike, have denounced the planned sale and last week tabled a Commons motion calling on the takeover to be referred to the competition watchdog, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Last week (January 24) the Commission published its 1995 report describing the activities of Stagecoach as "predatory and deplorable".

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The council owned bus company makes a profit year after year and pays a dividend to both councils. The Liberals have no mandate for what they are doing and the guarantees they have been given by Stagecoach - one of the most rapacious predators in the business - are worse than useless. The Liberals have a majority on the council, even with the three disqualified Liberal councillors, so they can push it through. But the day of reckoning will come when the unprofitable routes are abandoned and when the job losses start to come through."

Note to Editors: Out of the 15 enquiries into the bus industry carried out by the MMC since deregulation of the bus industry no fewer than eight involved Stagecoach. Pendle Council received a petition with the names of 13,000 local people who were against the sale. Three Liberal councillors, Ian Gilhespy (who works for Stagecoach), the Mayor of Pendle, Gillian Gilhespy, and John David are all disqualified from voting on the sell-off motion when it comes before the meeting of the full council on 31 January. More follows.....

CRUNCH VOTE LOOMS ON BUS SELL OFF

Note 2 to Editors: The following Early Day Motion, tabled by Pendle MP Gordon Prentice and Burnley MP Peter Pike, appeared on the Order Paper of the Commons on 24 January.

STAGECOACH AND BURNLEY AND PENDLE TRANSPORT

"This House notes that the Policy Committee of Liberal controlled Pendle Borough
Council is to meet on 24 January to consider a report recommending the sale for £2 million of the council's 50% stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport, a bus company jointly owned with Burnley Council, to the

predatory company Stagecoach which has a significant presence already in Lancashire and the North West, notes that Burnley and Pendle Transport makes a healthy profit year on year and pays dividends to both councils; further notes that the council company's pre tax profit margin in 1994 was higher than 14 out of the 20 remaining municipal bus companies and that it is an efficient and effective operation; condemns the cavalier disregard by the Liberals of the huge petition of 13,000 local people opposed to the sale, fears that an acquisition by Stagecoach will open the way for further predatory bids for the remaining municipal bus companies in East Lancashire and believes the issue should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the grounds that the purchase by Stagecoach would not promote competition, would reduce services and would be against the public interest."

For Immediate Release. Number: 41/96. Mon 29 January 1996

MP FURIOUS OVER COUNCIL GO-AHEAD FOR "RIP OFF" SALE AT BARLICK CIVIC HALL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says he is furious over the one day sale held at Barnoldswick Civic Hall last Tuesday (23 January) after local people complained they had been conned into buying electrical and other goods for twice as much as they could have got them elsewhere.

The MP said: "I am astonished this sale was allowed to go ahead after all the fuss I created last October over the one day sales at the Great Marsden Hotel and the North Valley Community Centre when the cheat and fraudster, William Stephen Beach, unloaded cheap and shoddy merchandise at prices way over the odds. I raised the issue in Parliament and I was given to believe the local council had changed its policy and was going to ban these one day sales in council owned premises. Now this!"

"Press reports say the Council had to allow bookings that were already in the pipeline to go ahead. But these one day sales should have been stopped right away - even if booking fees had to be reimbursed. These sales harm local businesses and we have enough evidence to show conclusively these sales always end in tears. The leaflets always talk of bankrupt stock or liquidations. They always feature cameras, expensive hi-fis and other electrical goods at a fraction of their ordinary retail price. The sales are designed to fleece unsuspecting shoppers of their hard earned cash. The council should have cancelled the outstanding bookings once the policy had been changed. Why on earth give these "one day wonders" yet another chance to rip people off?"

Note to Editors: Last October the Pendle MP drew attention at Westminster to the activities of William Stephen Beach of Table Top Marketing. He described Beach as an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat who was responsible for running two infamous "one day sales" in Pendle which left a string of people bitter and angry after they had been persuaded to buy shoddy goods.
more follows

MP FURIOUS OVER "RIP OFF" SALE

Note 2 to Editors: The MP's Early Day Motion last October read:

"This House utterly condemns the misrepresentation and underhand practices that characterise the "one day sales" put on by William Beach of 30 Pitville Court, Albert Road, Cheltenham, in which members of the public are conned into believing the boxes of goods they are buying unseen contain quality merchandise whereas in reality they are getting cheap and shoddy goods; notes that sales were held at the Great Marsden Hotel, Nelson and at the North Valley Community Centre, Colne in which people were led to believe they were buying bankrupt stock; sympathises with Mrs Lana Ellerton who ended up with two pillows and a clock, and who says people were put under pressure to buy goods they did not really want; regrets that pensioners and others were persuaded to hand over good money for worthless rubbish; further notes that Beach was previously a director of Gloucester Fancy Goods Ltd and J.B. Sales (Gloucester) Ltd, both now dissolved, and is currently a director of Table Top Marketing Ltd and Steve's Cash and Carry; believes that travelling salespeople who do not operate from a permanent retail base should be obliged to give advance notice of one day sales to the relevant Trading Standards Office; calls on the Government to review the law on consumer protection and how it can be more effectively applied; considers that Beach is an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat and urges people who consider themselves to be victims of misrepresentation to seek redress in the small claims court."

For Immediate Release. Number: 42/96. Mon 29 Jan 1996

MP SLAMS BETRAYAL OF HOMEOWNERS

Cuts in interest and mortgage rates cannot disguise the continuing slump

in the housing market according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. On the day the Government's controversial Housing Bill is introduced into the Commons, the MP claims the housing crisis is hitting people all over Pendle.

Speaking at Westminster today the MP said: "Official figures show house
prices fell again last year. In real terms, house prices are still more than 10% lower than when John Major came to office in November 1990. And mortgage transactions in 1995 were at their lowest for 21 years. We are in the middle of a housing slump."

"Too many people here in the North West are living in overcrowded conditions or in places unfit for human habitation. Here in Pendle we have the oldest housing stock in the North West - yet this Government has cut house building back to its lowest level for 50 years."

Note to Editors: *"We 'are going to make life easier for people buying their own home"*. John Major, Conservative Central office press conference, 31 March 1992.

In January 1994, the maximum mandatory home renovation grant to home owners cut from £50,000 to £20,000. In April 1994, the rate of mortgage interest tax relief cut from 25% to 20%. In April 1995, the rate of mortgage interest tax relief was cut to 15%. In July 1995, the Government announced plans to scrap mandatory home renovation grants to home owners. In October 1995, new borrowers no longer get help with their mortgage interest for their first nine months on income support after they lose their jobs. Existing borrowers no longer get help with mortgage interest for the first 2 months on income support. Help with interest on the full mortgage comes after 6 months on income support.

For Immediate Release. Number: 43/96. Mon 29 January 1996

MP CONDEMNS SCANDAL OF BENEFIT WASTE AND OVERPAYMENT

A massive £546.1 million in Income Support was paid out to the wrong people last year according to a report from the National Audit Office (NAO). The NAO spotted staggeringly high levels of overpayment when examining the Department of Social Security's accounts. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says the figures on error are the highest ever recorded.

The Pendle MP said: “Peter Lilley likes to talk tough at party conference but the extent of his incompetence is alarming. The National Audit Office report confirms that millions of pounds are going into the wrong pockets and purses. The Government can and should be doing more to improve the performance of the DSS and its agencies - they could make a start by implementing in full the proposals of the Social Security Select Committee, which Labour has endorsed in full but to which the Government has yet to respond.”

“Every £1 wrongly spent by the DSS and the Benefits Agency is £1 less for someone in real need. The Government would be better employed trying to save the money wasted in this way than in withdrawing and freezing benefits from one group of people in our community after another.”

Note to Editors: The head of the NAO, Sir John Bourn, qualified his opinion on the accounts, as he has done on Income Support every year since the benefit was introduced in 1988.

For Immediate Release. Number: 44/96. Wed 31 Jan 1996

PM AND CHANCELLOR AT LOGGERHEADS says PENDLE MP

The Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke and John Major are at loggerheads over the Prime Minister's plans to lop £35 billion more off government spending according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Chancellor has openly challenged John Major's aim of cutting public spending to 35 per cent of national income - Mr Clarke does not believe it can be cut below 40 per cent.

“This is the battle at the very heart of the government's economic policy. On the one hand, John Major, trapped by the party's right wing is demanding deep cuts in public spending.” (£35 billion - the gap between Mr Major's and Mr Clarke's plans is the equivalent of closing down the NHS)

The Pendle MP added: “Ken Clarke - last of the one nation Tories - is isolated and the target of a whispering campaign in Westminster. The Tory right are advancing on all fronts, with their agenda for the fifth Tory term moving centre-stage.”

“The Tory right wing wants huge cuts in public spending. (John Major wants more than £35 billion, Margaret Thatcher supports cuts of £68 billion). They also want to try again to privatise the post office (John Major's sop to the right); privatise the road network (actively sought by the right, and being examined by Sir George Young); bring in vouchers to replace state education - nurseries, are only the start); and return to the eleven-plus (actively supported by Mr Major despite the opposition of Gillian Shephard).

“What a deadly concoction of policies they want to force down our throats.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 45/96. Wed 31 January 1996

NORTH WEST WATER STAY TIGHT LIPPED

The Chairman of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, has told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, he is unwilling to disclose details of how much the company is budgeting to spend on carrying out vital improvements to the region’s water supplies and sewage treatment plants. Three weeks ago, the Pendle MP blasted the privatised utility for its refusal to give the National Rivers Authority (the statutory body responsible for ensuring water quality) details of its forward programme.

The NRA’s River Ribble Water Catchment Area Action Plan - published at the turn of the year - sets out the works scheduled to be done each year up to 1999. However, the document states: *“Throughout this section (on activity plans) please note that North West Water were asked to provide costs but were unwilling to provide figures for inclusion in the plan”*.

The Pendle MP said: “Sir Desmond Pitcher tells me the information requested by the NRA is commercially confidential but this is stretching things too far. The NRA simply wants to know what NWW plans to do over the next five years to sort out the mess that is our water and sewage system. And they are still in the dark!”

“People have been up in arms about the service they get from this privatised goliath. Since privatisation the company has received 100,897 written complaints and a staggering 11,230,338 queries about bills.”

Notes to editors: “Waterfacts” about North West Water follows.

For Immediate Release. Number: 46/96. Thurs 1 Feb 1996

MP WINS COMMONS DEBATE ON "ONE DAY SALES"

The controversial one day sales, dubbed as rip-offs by local MP, Gordon Prentice, are to be put under the spotlight in a Commons debate next Wednesday (7 February). The Speaker agreed to the MP's call for a debate after he told her the one day sales were spreading like a plague across the country.

The debate comes in the wake of the one day sale held at Barnoldswick Civic Hall on 23 January when local people complained they had been conned into buying electrical and other goods for twice as much as they could have got them elsewhere.

The MP said: "The people who run these sales know exactly what they are doing. They are the lowest form of pond life, conning people into believing they are getting high quality merchandise when they are getting shoddy rubbish. They are cheats and frauds and I shall be saying so."

The MP also criticised Pendle Council for allowing these sales to take place on council owned premises. The council has now changed its policy but allowed sales which had already been booked to go ahead. Earlier this week the MP said the council should have cancelled these and returned any booking fee.

Note to Editors: Last October the Pendle MP drew attention at Westminster to the activities of William Stephen Beach of Table Top Marketing. He described Beach as an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat who was responsible for running two infamous "one day sales" in Pendle which left a string of people bitter and angry after they had been persuaded to buy shoddy goods.

For Immediate Release. Number: 47/96. Thurs 1 Feb 1996

BOURNEMOUTH STILL CASHING IN OVER PENDLE

Figures unearthed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, show the South coast retirement haven of Bournemouth is getting £94.49p a head more from central government than recession hit Pendle. Two years ago when the MP first threw the spotlight on the Pendle/Bath/Bournemouth triangle, Bournemouth got £93.58p more than Pendle.

The Pendle MP said: “The gap between Pendle and Bournemouth is actually getting wider. That really takes the biscuit! It beggars belief that the south coast town gets more central government support than we do in North East Lancashire.”

"The total amount of central government financial support to Pendle works out at £230.80p per person compared with £325.29p in Bournemouth. In Bath - a place I've never thought of as particularly deprived - the Council there gets £234.32 per head. The present system is obviously seriously flawed."

Note to Editors: The information is derived from a Parliamentary Answer (30 Jan 1996) to a question tabled by the Pendle MP. The per capita figures are derived from the 1995/6 Revenue Support Grant, Specific and Special Grants and redistributed non domestic rates together with credit approvals and capital grants. The latest available figures for 1995/6 show total central government support for Pendle (pop 85,600) is £19,757,000; Bath (pop 83,900) £19,660,000 and Bournemouth (pop 159,200) £51,787000.

For Immediate Release. Number: 48/96. Mon 5 February 1996

INSECURITY “THE MODERN PLAGUE” says PRENTICE

Insecurity is the modern plague according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking to Labour Party members and supporters in neighbouring Hyndburn this Friday (9 February) the Pendle MP will say:

“Today people are feeling ever more insecure. They are concerned about the provision of health care, the education of their children, the security of their employment and a home for their family. As Tony Blair said last week: *‘Between the underclass and the overclass is a new and growing anxious class... People in work but dogged by insecurity and struggling to make ends meet.”*”

“Figures released last week show that in 1995 court actions were entered for repossession of 84,170 homes and that 49,410 homes were repossessed. Since John Major took office over 325,000 homes have been repossessed. One in ten homeowners are suffering from negative equity.”

“The crisis in the housing market is a direct consequence of the boom and bust policies of this government. The Tories doubled interest rates

in less than 18 months to 15% in October 1989. The disastrous consequences for the economy and the housing market mean that house prices have fallen by over 10% since 1990."

"You are now 10 times more likely to be repossessed than you were in 1979. And 420,000 homeowners are more than 3 months in arrears with their mortgage. Insecurity in the labour market damages the housing market. Without the prospect of a secure future in employment people cannot take a chance on buying or moving house."

"Since John Major took office over one million jobs have been lost with unemployment still well over half a million higher, but it is not just the quantity of employment that counts but also the quality of work. The Government's unstated but clear aim is to change the UK into the sweatshop of Europe competing on the basis of a low-wage, low-skill and part-time workforce.

• One in five of those of working age have no qualifications at all.

• One in three of 16-19 year olds have no 'O' level or equivalent.

• The UK has the lowest proportion of 15-19 year olds in full-time education of any industrialised country bar Turkey.

"Since 1979 there have been massive changes in the structure of the labour market with a fall of 20% in male full-time working and a massive increase in part-time working for both men & women. Many people working part-time do so because they cannot get a full-time job while 4 in 10 of temporary employees cannot find a permanent job. Over 1.5 million people are in temporary employment."

"With people changing jobs more often what people need is help to get the skills they need to move from welfare to work but the Government penalise those who study while unemployed and do not provide the funds for quality training. Labour has proposed a windfall tax on the excess monopoly profits of the privatised utilities to fund a welfare to work programme to tackle youth unemployment. The £20 billion cost of unemployment is not only socially unjust but is wasteful of the resources and potential of the unemployed."

The Pendle MP said: "It is an astonishing fact that there are more people on work-related government training programmes than there are in the armed forces."

Number: 49/96. EMBARGOED **until 1pm Wed 7 February 1996**

MP DUBS SALESMAN "AN EVIL CALCULATING CHEAT"

A Blackpool trader, Mr Steve Johnson who operates from 2 Princess Street in the resort town, will be dubbed "an evil calculating cheat and con man" this Wednesday when Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will use a Commons adjournment debate to denounce the man as a swindler.

Mr Johnson's one day sale in Barnoldswick Civic Hall on 23 January left local people hundreds of pounds lighter in their pockets and purses. People say they were sold cheap and shoddy goods and misrepresentation was rife.

The Pendle MP said: "Words are inadequate to describe vultures such as Johnson who target areas for their phoney "star bargains and no gimmicks" sales. They don't advertise in the press for that would be to give the game away. Instead, 24 hours before the sale, leaflets, without any imprint, are circulated in a neighbourhood promising top quality branded goods such as Sony, JVC, Hitachi and Panasonic. People are told the goods will be cleared at knock down prices - but they never are. The sale starts. A few video and audio tapes are sold for a pound or 50p. Then torches in blister packs go for 50p. The doors to the hall are then closed and a couple of heavies are stationed outside. Latecomers are told the the sale has started and are turned away. Then Johnson and his team move into top gear to con unsuspecting people into buying cheap and shoddy rubbish. People are told they cannot open their purchases during the sale - only afterwards."

"On Sunday, I drove over to Blackpool from Pendle to beard the lion in his den but the shutters were up at 2 Princess Street and there was no-one at home. The sign outside the shop said fancy goods and gifts were sold and there was an 'adult section'. I tried to get Johnson on the number he gave the council when booking the hall. (01253 299775) It was unobtainable."

"I want to shine a very public spotlight on this swindler. I don't want him or his friends within 20 miles of Pendle in future."

<u>Note to Editors:</u> The Pendle MP wants all commercial leaflets delivered house to house to carry the imprint of the trader and his or her business address and phone number. He wants prominent signs to be displayed outside halls and other venues where these sales are held giving the name and address of the sale promoter and the purpose of the sale (eg to sell bankrupt stock or such like). The MP also wants the local Trading Standards Office to be informed of the sale at the same time the booking is made. And local authorities should not make council premises available to one day traders unless the authority is

prepared to accept joint liability for any false descriptions and misrepresentations that may be made.

Last October the Pendle MP drew attention at Westminster to the activities of William Stephen Beach of Table Top Marketing. He described Beach as an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat who was responsible for running two infamous "one day sales" in Pendle which left a string of people bitter and angry after they had been persuaded to buy shoddy goods.

The MP's Early Day Motion last October read:

"This House utterly condemns the misrepresentation and underhand practices that characterise the "one day sales" put on by William Beach of 30 Pitville Court, Albert Road, Cheltenham, in which members of the public are conned into believing the boxes of goods they are buying unseen contain quality merchandise whereas in reality they are getting cheap and shoddy goods; notes that sales were held at the Great Marsden Hotel, Nelson and at the North Valley Community Centre, Colne in which people were led to believe they were buying bankrupt stock; sympathises with Mrs Lana Ellerton who ended up with two pillows and a clock, and who says people were put under pressure to buy goods they did not really want; regrets that pensioners and others were persuaded to hand over good money for worthless rubbish; further notes that Beach was previously a director of Gloucester Fancy Goods Ltd and J.B. Sales (Gloucester) Ltd, both now dissolved, and is currently a director of Table Top Marketing Ltd and Steve's Cash and Carry; believes that travelling salespeople who do not operate from a permanent retail base should be obliged to give advance notice of one day sales to the relevant Trading Standards Office; calls on the Government to review the law on consumer protection and how it can be more effectively applied; considers that Beach is an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat and urges people who consider themselves to be victims of misrepresentation to seek redress in the small claims court."

For Immediate Release. Number: 50/96. Mon 5 Feb 1996

MP URGES LOCAL GROUPS TO BID FOR DUCHY CASH

The Benevolent Fund of the Duchy of Lancaster - which distributes money from the estates of those who die within the boundaries of the old County of Lancashire without making a will - gave £200 to a young person in Earby last year. They also gave £400 to Mansfield High School; £450 to Barnoldswick Park Rovers FC; £1,000 to Pendle Duke of

Edinburgh's Award Team and £500 to Colne Parish Church. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Roger Freeman, gave details of the 1995 donations to the Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who has been a vociferous critic of the Duchy.

The MP said: "More donations were made to Pendle groups in 1995 than in previous years and that is certainly very good news. The money is there for the asking and I'd like to see more local organisations and individuals pitch in and ask for a share."

Note to Editors: In 1994 Burnley and Pendle Greenspace received £400 and £250 went to a Nelson woman who is handicapped. Grants to Pendle people in 1993 amounted to £714 - £150 to an invalid in Colne, £500 to a handicapped person in Barnoldswick and £64 to another handicapped person in Barnoldswick. In 1994 the Pendle MP persuaded the the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to reverse a decision of the Duchy's Benevolent Fund not to grant aid the Lancashire Free Legal Advice Centre who needed money to buy updates for their law library.

Two years ago the Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, called on the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; to abandon the "mediaeval practices" which transfer to the Duchy the estates of those who die without making a will in the County Palatine (the old Lancashire boundary). He said at the time there was a clear and compelling case for getting rid of this "anomalous throwback to the Middle Ages." The history of the Duchy of Lancaster goes back to the 13th century. Since 1399 this estate passed to each reigning monarch with the Duchy revenues providing a source of income separate from other Crown inheritances. This separate identity was preserved when in 1760 George III surrendered the revenue from the Crown Estates to the Government in exchange for the Civil List but retained the Duchy of Lancaster revenues.

For Immediate Release. Number: 51/96. Tues 6 February 1996

MP WELCOMES ANOTHER LOTTERY BOOST

News that Pendle Council is to get £420,000 from the National Lottery to refurbish Colne Municipal Hall has been welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice. Pendle Youth Orchestra is to get a £22,000 grant towards the cost of buying new musical instruments.

The Pendle MP said: "This is marvellous news indeed. The money will completely transform the Municipal Hall. The orchestra will be over the moon."

ends

Note to Editors: Pendle Borough Council, Lancashire

Grant awarded: £420,000 Total project cost: £560,112

This grant contributes towards refurbishment of the Municipal Hall, Colne, an Edwardian Music Hall built in 1901. It will pay for re-wiring, disabled access, new seating and air conditioning, sound proofing, new technical equipment, heating and refreshment areas.

Pendle Youth Orchestra, Lancashire

Grant awarded: £22,000 Total project cost: £25,000

This grant is towards the cost of purchasing new instruments which will enable more young people to learn to play, regardless of their financial circumstances.

For Immediate Release. Number: 52/96. Wed 7 Feb 1996

MP CONDEMNS LATEST KASHMIR ATROCITY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, quizzed Foreign Office Minister, Jeremy Hanley in the Commons today over the latest atrocity in Azad Kashmir. Many of the MP's constituents have family connections with the area and are pressing for a peaceful resolution of the regional conflict.

The MP, who is a member of the Parliamentary All Party Kashmir Group, asked the Minister if he could shed any light on who was responsible for the missile attack on Kahuta - a border town in Azad Kashmir - which destroyed a mosque killing 18 people. Among the dead were young children. Many were injured. Officials from the UN Military Observers Group visited the area and the MP wanted to know what reports had been received from the UN.

Prentice told the Minister: "This appalling attack which happened at the end of January and the other attacks on prominent leaders of the All Parties Hurriyet Conference make it very difficult if not impossible to move forwards to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Kashmir." The MP wants those responsible brought to book.

Note to Editors: Some reports claim the attack was initiated across the Line of Control from Indian occupied territory.

For Immediate Release. Number: 53/96. Wed 7 February 1996

SCOTT REPORT ALL ABOUT HONESTY IN GOVERNMENT says PENDLE MP

'The Scott report on arms to Iraq is all about standards in public life and honesty in government" says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster on the day the Scott report was handed to the Government. However, MPs like himself have to wait a further eight days before they can have sight of the report.

Prentice said: “It is an example of the most manipulative kind of politics imaginable that gives Government Ministers eight days to digest the implications of a 2,000 page report and Opposition MPs a matter of hours.”

The MP added: "Parliament and Government must change the political culture which made this scandal possible. The work of the Scott inquiry has been thorough and it has been fair.”

“Seventeen members of staff will be working for the Government to prepare its response to the report - more than the entire staff of the Scott Inquiry. This immense effort has not been invested in promoting the public interest, but in protecting minister's interests.

Note to Editors: The Scott inquiry examined two charges: That ministers changed export guidelines but told Parliament that they had not. That the government attempted to deny access to documents essential to the defence for company directors accused of breaking those guidelines. On the first charge, the official papers show that those who changed the guidelines were more worried about the public finding out than they were about Saddam Hussein enhancing his military capacity.

On the second charge, no previous government, Labour or Conservative, ever invoked Public Interest Immunity certificates in any criminal trial. A key task of the Scott Inquiry is to establish whether the Government was justified in changing the practice of decades.

For Immediate Release. Number: 54/96. Wed 7 February 1996

PENDLE MP BACKS LORDS REFORM

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said this evening that Labour's agenda for constitutional renewal would transform the nation for the better. The MP was speaking as the Labour Leader was outlining the Party's plans for change in the John Smith Memorial Lecture at the QEII Conference Centre at Westminster.

Prentice said: "Behind Dr Mawhinney's bluster, the Tories are once again defending the power and privilege of the tiny few at the top - and ignoring the rest of us. Labour wants to give power back to ordinary people. But the Conservatives want to keep power for the few, in the hands of central government, with the unelected."

"Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the Conservatives defence of the voting rights of hereditary peers - men and women allowed to decide on laws not the basis of the popular will or on merit, but simply by accident of birth."

"It is absurd for Britain to go into the 21st century with a mediaeval Parliament."

For Immediate Release. Number: 55/96. Thurs 8 Feb 1996

PAY MORE AND GET LESS - COUNCIL TAX TO RISE

"Government Ministers have confirmed Labour's warnings that Council Tax payers in Pendle will have to pay more but get less" says the area's MP, Gordon Prentice. The service cuts will hit Labour controlled Lancashire County Council and Liberal run Pendle. "To a greater or lesser extent they are in the same boat" said the MP.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today the MP said: "Ministers have admitted that their Budget strategy assumes that, on average, the Council Tax will rise by 8 per cent and it could be even more. Over the next three years, the Government expects Council Tax payers to cough up an extra £3.5 billion."

"But paying more won't mean more and better services - far from it. Services could be reduced. The Government expect class sizes to rise and school meal prices to go up. Services for pensioners could be cut back and there still won't be enough money for councils to provide proper care in the community. It's another kick in the teeth for people in Pendle"

Note to Editors: The Government has now voted through Parliament the amount of money which it will give each council next year. The

details confirm Labour's warning that the Government expects Council Tax payers to pay an extra £3.5 billion over the next three years. They also show that the Government is continuing to pour money into Tory Westminster Council at the expense of everywhere else.

William Waldegrave has admitted to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that the Government's Budget strategy assumes that Council Tax will rise by an average of 8 per cent next year. This means an overall rise in Council Tax next year of £780 million - equal to 0.5p on Income Tax.

For Immediate Release. Number: 56/96. Friday 9 Feb 1996

MP SLAMS HESELTINE OVER LATE PAYMENT STRATEGY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is refusing to let the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, off the hook over his statement that delaying payments until the last moment is a legitimate way of conducting business.

Prentice said: “At last, the mask has slipped. After all his windy rhetoric about being the friend of the small businessperson we get an insight into how he operates - leaving payment until the last dying kick.” The MP has condemned the Deputy Prime Minister’s late payment strategy in a House of Commons motion.

Note to Editors: The Early Day Motion on the Conduct of the Rt Hon Member for Henley and late payment which appears on the Commons Order Paper reads:

That this House draws the attention of the Deputy Prime Minister to the comments of his Right honourable Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that "late payments wreak havoc with cash flow, and for many small firms they can make the difference between survival and failure"; demands an apology from the Deputy Prime Minister for his insensitive boast that he was "quite skilful at stringing along the creditors"; draws attention to the remarks of his former business partner, Mr lan Josephs, regarding the Deputy Prime Minister’s appalling practices of "sending out cheques which needed two signatures and signing only once", ensuring that "words and figures on the cheque do not match", and not answering writs; asks the Deputy Prime Minister whether he stands by the view he expressed to Mr Joseph that there are three kinds of bills needing payments "when the writ was to be issued, then when it expired and when the bailiffs came";

calls on the Deputy Prime Minister to demonstrate his attitude has changed by supporting a requirement for large companies to state their payment practices in their annual reports and examining the strong case for the introduction of a legal right to interest on late payment above a given amount, and condemns the Deputy Prime Minister for an attitude which has resulted in the Government owing £232 million to business.

For Immediate Release. Number: 57/96. Fri 9 February 1996

PRENTICE CONDEMNS 18TH HIKE IN PRESCRIPTION CHARGES AS "A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed the latest hike in prescription charges which puts the cost up to £5.50p. The increase follows the earlier one last February which hiked prescription charges by 50p to £5.25p. In 1994 there was a 11.6% increase taking the charge to £4.75. In March 1993 prescription charges were pushed up by 13% to £4.25.

Speaking at Westminster today the MP hit out at the increase: "The record shows that the increases in prescription charges are galloping way ahead of inflation. There have been enormous increases year after year. This is the 18th increase in prescription charges since 1979 when they stood at 20p. Today's prescriptions cost more than 26 times the amount under the last Labour Government. Even after discounting inflation over this period, prescriptions are 10 times more expensive than they used to be."

"The Conservative record on health is enough to make anyone feel sick" said the MP.

ends

Note to Editors: The Commons motion which appears on the Order Paper today reads: That this House condemns the Government for increasing prescription charges 18 times since 1979 notes that today's increases now stand at nearly 10 times the level they were under the last Labour Government in real terms and 26.4 times in cash terms; and believes that by choosing to make the announcement through a written parliamentary answer without debate, the Government has been shown in its true colours and has revealed Its attitude towards the most vulnerable people who through no fault of their own require medicines for their illness.

For Immediate Release. Number: 58/96. Mon 12 February 1996

EX-GAS CHIEF'S £250,000 PENSION "OBSCENE" says MP

The £247,000 pension for ex British Gas Chief Executive, Cedric Brown, is obscene according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, who is currently serving on the Finance Bill Standing Committee which puts the Budget proposals into law, confessed he was "staggered" by the generosity of the pension. The Committee will shortly be looking at share option schemes such as the one at ASDA which was torpedoed by the Government.

The MP said: "There seems to be one law for the Cedric Browns of this world and another for people such as the ASDA workers at Colne."

"People are quite rightly hopping mad over British Gas's failure to deliver a basic service - complaints to British Gas are at a record level. And to cap it all we now have this grotesquely extravagant pension. He will receive a pension of £247,000 a year at a cost to the British Gas pension scheme of at least £4 million. When his basic salary went up by 75% from £270,000 to £475,000 in 1994 it cost the British Gas pension scheme over £1 million. In addition, he will be kept on by British Gas as a consultant receiving a further £120,000 and a company car for one year as part of his retirement package. Yet Richard Giordano, chairman of British Gas, has the brass neck to describe this as a "modest package".

"The Prime Minister set up the Greenbury Committee to investigate abuse of share options, pay and pensions by the directors of the monopoly privatised utilities yet he has not acted on the Committee's raft of recommendations - despite saying he would. The whole thing is an absolute disgrace" fumed the MP.

For Immediate Release. Number: 59/96. Tues 13 February 96

TORY CHAIRMAN CONFUSES ONE MILLER FOR ANOTHER

Conservative Party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, gaffed yesterday when he claimed Jonathan Miller *"author and director"* defended the Lords as providing a *"truly independent platform."* It was in fact Jonathan Miller, the journalist, who had made the statement.

Jonathan Miller, author and director responded: "I an outraged at being used as a glove puppet by Mawhinney. The House of Lords is a ludicrous arrangement, a Gilbert and Sullivan farce. The man is a fool."

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Brian Mawhinney's arguments in favour of allowing peers such as Lord Brocket a say in determining how our laws are made is absurd. Brocket has just been sentenced to 5 years in jail for trying to defraud his insurance company after claiming four of his classic cars had been stolen. His father the second Lord Brocket was a well known fascist. His grandfather, the first Lord Brocket, bought the title from Lloyd George. Enough said."

For Immediate Release. Number: 60/96. Tues 13 February 1996

GOVERNMENT DELAYS COUNCIL OPT OUTS IN BLACKPOOL AND BLACKBURN

The Government this evening put on hold the planned opt outs by Blackpool and Blackburn from Lancashire County Council.

In a written Parliamentary Answer, the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, said he was staging the implementation of the newly created unitary authorities to give the Government time to consider the Local Government Commission's recommendations of 19 December.

The Environment Secretary said: "We have reluctantly concluded that implementation of reorganisation in the remaining areas for which we have not already laid orders cannot take place in 1997. I intend to make a further announcement..."

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The Government has not yet laid orders for Blackpool and Blackburn. The proposed local government reorganisation in Lancashire seems to be still-born. There could still be elections to the new shadow authorities in 1997 but the new authorities will not be up and running until 1998 - well after the next General Election."

"This is another example of the Government running out of time. The General Election is beginning to cast a long shadow over everything they want to do."

For Immediate Release. Number: 61/96. Wed 14 February 1996

MP SLAMS GOVERNMENT RECORD ON LAW AND ORDER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today released figures showing a "yawning gulf" between the levels of recorded crime and the number of people convicted or cautioned.

Speaking at Westminster the MP said: "Between 1980 and 1994, recorded crime in Lancashire Police Force Area increased by 108.1% - up from 61,171 to 127,300 offences."

"Yet the number of people convicted of offences has fallen by 30.8%. Even if we add in the numbers of people cautioned, there has still been a fall of 16%. These figures show that under this Government there is more crime and more criminals getting away with it."

"The Tories have the worst record on crime of any post war government. Crime under the Tories has risen twice as fast as under any Labour government. The Police and Local Councils are working hard to tackle crime, but there are no grounds for the Government's complacency."

"Labour is now setting the agenda on crime. Our plans to get tough with criminal anti-social behaviour by bad neighbours were welcomed by the police, councils and the Commission for Racial Equality - but rubbished initially by John Major. Now the Government is introducing a poor imitation of our proposals."

"We've been calling for eight years for a ban on the sale of knives to young people. Michael Howard voted against it in 1988 but now he's been forced to act. We've also proposed major reforms to tackle court delays, improve the Crown Prosecution Service and deal with persistent juvenile offenders. But there's been only silence from the Government."

For Immediate Release. Number: 62/96. Wed 14 February 1996

MAJOR WILL NOT GET OFF SCOTT FREE SAYS PENDLE MP

"The Scott report, to be published tomorrow, is about standards in public life and honesty in government" said Gordon Prentice today. Speaking at Westminster on the eve of publication he fumed that he - in common with all other backbenchers - will be unable to quiz the President of the Board of Trade on the report. "It is absurd we cannot

see the report until the Minister completes his statement to the House and sits down."

The MP continued: "Seventeen members of staff will be working for the Government to prepare their response to the report - more than the entire staff of the Scott Inquiry. This immense effort has not been invested in promoting the public interest, but in protecting ministers' interests."

"It is totally unacceptable that Robin Cook will only be allowed to see the 1,800 page Scott report alone and in a "controlled environment" under escort at midday tomorrow, just three and a half hours before the debate."

"The Government won a vote yesterday in the House of Lords to reject a call by Labour peers' leader Lord Richard for "reasonable time and facilities to Opposition spokesmen" before Thursday's statement on the Scott report. We lost the vote because the Government had the support of too many hereditary peers. If only life peers had voted, Labour would have won with a sizable majority. There are people voting in Parliament because their grandmother slept with a duke."

Note to Editors: The Scott inquiry examined two charges: That ministers changed export guidelines but told parliament that they had not. That the government attempted to deny access to documents essential to the defence for company directors accused of breaking those guidelines.

For Immediate Release. Number: 63/96. Wed 14 February 1996

PENDLE MP STANDS UP FOR BINGO CLUBS

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice today announced his support for local bingo clubs. The bingo industry is campaigning for a cut in bingo duty from 10% to 8.75%, to boost prizes for players and compensate for the impact of the National Lottery. Mr Prentice has thrown his weight behind Labour's move to achieve this reduction on the Finance Bill.

The Bingo Association of Great Britain has welcomed the new clause tabled on the Finance Bill by the Labour Party, and has called on all MPs to support it.

The Pendle MP said: "In these days of the National Lottery, Bingo seems to be getting the status of the poor relation. Bingo clubs deserve treatment and assistance similar to that given to other parts of the

betting industry. Bingo has 3 million regular players, and for many players the social aspect of clubs is as important as playing the game. We must consider the benefits provided by bingo - I know that many of my constituents enjoy it enormously."

"Despite Treasury denials, the impact of the National Lottery on the bingo industry is clear. A new report by the Harris Research Centre shows that until the launch of the Lottery in November 1994, bingo club admission and profitability were growing. By the end of 1995, profitability had fallen by an alarming 35% and admissions were down by 14.5%. At least 35 clubs have already been forced to close, with the loss of nearly 1,500."

"The modest 1% cut in bingo duty that Labour proposes would go a long way to solving the problems currently faced by the bingo industry."

For Immediate Release. Number: 64/96. Wed 14 February 1996

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN

The number of people out of work in Pendle rose sharply in January to 2,179 (5.9%) from the December figure of 2,034 - an increase of 145. There are 1,696 men out of work and claiming benefit (8%) and 483 women 3.1%).
There were 92 vacancies at the Job Centre in Colne and 162 at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The rise is not unexpected as there are redundancies in the pipeline and these will now start to show up in the figures. Tragically, there was a haemorrhage of jobs in the closing months of last year. Despite all the Government's rhetoric, we have yet to turn the corner here in Pendle."

"Unemployment in Pendle has been higher in every single month since November 1990 when John Major became Prime Minister."

For Immediate Release. Number: 65/96. Thurs 15 Feb 1996

PARLIAMENT WAS MISLED says SCOTT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has launched a stinging attack on what the Government's alleged "duplicity" following the publication of the Scott Report this afternoon. Speaking at Westminster this evening after speed

reading a couple of hundred pages, the MP said: “I have only managed to get through a small part of the report - which is over 2,000 pages long, comes in five volumes and weighs over a stone - since I collected my copy from the Vote Office this afternoon but some simple truths leap out of the page at the reader.”

“The way in which the report was released was worthy of a Whitehall farce and the Government is guilty of a blatant attempt to manipulate the news media and the way in which the story would be reported. Ministers want to get their version of events accepted now - well in advance of the Commons debate on 26 February.”

“However, the facts are these. The guidelines on defence sales to Saddam Hussein were changed and that to describe the change as only a change of interpretation is "incapable of being sustained by serious argument" says Scott. The guidelines were changed.”

“The Government failed to inform Parliament of the change. The failure, in Lord Justice Scott's words, was deliberate and a result of three ministers agreeing to give it no publicity. Parliament was deliberately kept in the dark.”

“Government statements on defence exports to Iraq "consistently failed" in Sir Richard's opinion, to comply with the guidance set out in the publication “Questions of Procedure for Minister” and failed to discharge the principle of Ministerial accountability. Ministers failed in their duty of accountability.”
More follows

PARLIAMENT WAS MISLED says SCOTT

“"There is clear evidence" says Scott that the Government knew about the supergun a full year before its seizure by Customs.”

“Intelligence information that the machine tools from Matrix Churchill that went to the Iraqi arms programme was "so strong" that for Ministers to maintain that they were for civilian use was "the equivalent to the Nelsonian use of a blind eye" says Scott.”

“Public Interest Immunity certificates denying the defence in the Matrix Churchill trial a whole class of documents had never before been used in a criminal trial, and Sir Richard recommends they should never be used again. The Government was wrong to use PIIs.”

“Sir Richard describes as "risible" the defence by the then Minister at the Foreign Office, Tristan Garel-Jones, that release of the document would cause "unquantifiable damage" to the public interest.”

“The Attorney General was personally at fault in the failure of the Government Law Officers to instruct the prosecution to tell the trial judge that the current Deputy Prime Minister signed his PII certificate under protest. Lyell was personally at fault.”

“As we are turn the pages, these are the facts which are emerging from the vast, detailed and comprehensive report from Sir Richard Scott. The Government should now do the honest thing and accept full responsibility for the whole sordid affair.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 66/96. Mon 19 Feb 1996

GOVERNMENT STARTS TO SQUIRM OVER SCOTT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has promised a barrage of questions next Monday when the Commons debates the Scott Report into arms to Iraq. In an exchange at Question Time last Thursday - the day of publication - the MP told the Prime Minister that the Government had contemptuously dismissed Lord Justice Scott’s view that the 2,000 page report should be made available to everyone at the same time. The Prime Minister dismissed the Pendle MP’s complaint as “silly”.

Prentice said: “The charge is anything but silly. Now that we have had the weekend to read and digest this enormous report, a growing number of questions need to be answered. Why, for example, did the government say Scott said Waldegrave did not mislead parliament when the report confirms on at least 12 different occasions that he did mislead parliament? Why did the Government claim the report says *“answers given to parliamentary questions gave an accurate description of the Government's policy on exports”* when the report states *“answers ... failed to inform parliament of the current state of government policy. This failure was deliberate.”*?

The Government brazenly said *“there was no change of policy in 1989”* when the report says *“it is clear that policy on defence sees to Iraq did not remain unchanged.”*? Why the Government claimed *“Ministers signed the PII certificates ... as was required by law”* when the report states the proposition Ministers were under a legal duty to sign was *“based on a fundamental misconception of the principles of PIIlaw.”*? Why Michael Heseltine said “we would not sell equipment that could have exasperated the war, that's quite clear, from Sir Richard's report”

when the report says ministers approved the see of lathes to Iraq in January 1988 and that Ministers knew arms sold to Jordan ended up in the hands of Saadam?

“The Scott report - and the actions of the Government in covering up

more follows

GOVERNMENT STARTS TO SQUIRM OVER SCOTT

the report's true conclusions - show just how dishonourable the Tories have become.”

Note to Editors: Conservative MP Richard Shepherd told GMTV: "It is not enough to hang your defence on a couple of rather friendly phrases when the burden of the report presents a dismal picture of the conduct within Whitehall.”

Conservative MP Peter Thurnham told PA News: "For many months I have been increasingly concerned about falling values and standards of public service in the Conservative party ... this week's Scott report and the way the government responded have only added o my dissatisfaction."

For Immediate Release. Number: 67/96. Mon 19 February 1996

MP DEMANDS NEW PROBE INTO AIKMAN PAY-OFF

News that the former Chief Executive of Burnley Health Care Trust, Maggie Aikman, has landed a new job within the NHS as Director of Finance at the Gwent Health Commission (the new Welsh NHS body which combines the former local health district with the FHSA) 16 months after her resignation from Burnley has stunned Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Ms Aikman left the Burnley NHS Trust on 28 October 1994 with a pay-off just short of a quarter of a million pounds. Reports suggest her new job carries a salary of £48,000.

The Pendle MP said: “The precise details of the pay-off have never been made public but the guidance to NHS Trusts from the Department of Health allows an element in any agreed termination settlement to cover future employment prospects where these may have been diminished. “I find it staggering that Ms Aikman can walk away from Burnley Health Care Trust a little over a year ago with a cool £247,000 and, in the blink of an eye, find herself back in the NHS on £48,000 a year.”

“If there is an element in the pay-off that supposedly compensates for diminished employment prospects then this sum clearly should be returned to the Health Service. We are talking here about very large sums of public money. I am writing to the Health Secretary about this and also to the new Chair of Burnley Health Care Trust, Mr Ron Foster.”

Note to Editors: This Early Day Motion appeared in the Commons Order Paper on 2 November 1994 in the names of Peter Pike MP (Burnley), Gordon Prentice MP (Pendle) and Janet Anderson MP (Rossendale):

"That this House believes that there should be an urgent and independent inquiry into the affairs and management of Burnley Health Care Trust; notes that in September Mr Ian Mahady, a gynaecologist and clinical director, was sacked at 3 hour's notice and offered a cash payment of £100,000 and that despite this being done at the time with the alleged agreement of the Trust Chief Executive, Mrs M. Aikman and Trust Chairman, Mr James Rawson, and with the backing of the Trust

More follows

Board, on Monday 24 October Mr Rawson asked Mrs Aikman to resign; notes that on Tuesday 25 October Mrs Aikman called on Mr Rawson to resign and said that she was being made the scapegoat; notes that on Friday 28 October she resigned with a cash settlement understood to be in excess of £250,000 and with a clause preventing her from making any comment, notes that on Monday 31 October the Medical Advisory Council of the Trust called for the resignation of the Medical Director, Dr Sam Pickens, who is understood to be willing to go on payment of £1 million; and believes the Trust clearly no longer has the confidence of the people of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale who see management wrangles and misuse of funds for cash pay-outs to resolve these problems rather than for medical treatment for people within the Trust area."

On 28 November 1994, Burnley MP, Peter Pike, raised the issue in an adjournment debate. By then, the Trust had no Chief Executive or Chairman following the resignations of Maggie Aikman and (on Thursday 24 November) James Rawson.

Note 2 to Editors: The following letter was sent to the Pendle MP by Health Minister, Tom Sackville, on 22 November 1994.

"Thank you for your letters of 29 and 31 October to Virginia Bottomley supporting recent calls by Peter Pike for an independent inquiry into the management at Burnley Health Care NHS Trust and asking about the terms and conditions of Mrs Maggie Aikman's settlement on resigning from her position as Chief Executive. I can appreciate your concern.

"Burnley Health care NHS Trust, like any other NHS Trust, is an autonomous employing authority with full responsibility for the local recruitment, retention and dismissal of NHS staff. NHS Trusts are empowered to make payments in connection with the termination of the employment of their staff. The responsibility for any settlement lies ultimately with the Trust Chairman who is personally accountable for the termination payment to the Chief Executive. Guidance on systems and principles for handling severance payments has been issued to Trusts and includes the advice that arrangements, which they may consider necessary to protect confidentiality, should not be framed so as to prevent proper public scrutiny. The NHS Executive is seeking assurances from the Chairman of Burnley Health Care NHS Trust that the payment on termination of the contract of the former Chief Executive was made with regard to probity and value for money, applying the guidance and the principles of public accountability."

"Although the Trust is responsible for managing its own affairs, Ministers have been closely watching the situation over the past few weeks to ensure that patient care was not compromised."

"Since your letters, I understand that doctors and management at the Trust have resolved their differences and are working closely together to bring management stability to local healthcare. I am confident that the Trust will now quickly put the recent difficulties behind it and continue to provide services of which the local community can be proud."

For Immediate Release. Number: 68/96.Tues 20 February 1996

MP URGES EARLY BAN ON VEAL CRATES IN EUROPE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging the rapid phasing out of veal crates in continental Europe. Crates were banned in the UK in 1990 on the grounds they were cruel.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: “Last month, the European Commission published proposals to begin phasing out veal crates in the EU from 1998 over a ten year period. This is far too long. The phase-

out here in the UK took just 3 years. We should be looking at an absolute maximum of 5 years for phasing-out veal crates in every country of the European Union."

"Our farmers in the UK have a relatively good record on animal welfare. It cannot be in their interests for this record to be tarnished by the cruelty of the veal crate system. UK farmers produce only about 20% of the total veal consumed in the UK. Around half a million calves are exported from this country every year so it is right we should take a view. "

"It is quite unacceptable for calves to be exported from the UK to be kept in relative darkness, deliberately malnourished in crates in which they cannot turn around. The Opposition is actively discussing humane options for surplus dairy calves with the UK industry. But the Agriculture Minister, Douglas Hogg, is now reported as saying that even if a ban is legal he will not stop the export of calves into crates."

Note to Editors: In December 1995, the RSPCA, Compassion in World Farming and the International Fund for Animal Welfare succeeded in securing a judicial review at the European Court of Justice on the legality of an export ban. This is still pending.

For Immediate Release. Number: 69/96. Tues 20 February 1996

LOCAL MP STUNNED BY ALBERT HARTLEY JOB LOSSES

News that 144 jobs are to go at one of Barnoldswick's biggest employers, Albert Hartley Ltd, has stunned local MP, Gordon Prentice, who described the redundancies as a calamity.

The MP, who lives in the town, said the firm looked set to lose half its employees. The firm makes bedding, duvets and other fabrics for Marks and Spencer and other leading High Street retailers.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "I have written to the company asking for an early meeting to find out precisely what the firm's plans are. Like everyone else, I am shocked at this news which will devastate the town. I shall do everything I can to turn things round but I need a detailed briefing from the company on where the problem - as they see it - lies."

"This comes on top of all the other recent closures. We have seen Bairdtex pull out of Trawden with the loss of over a hundred jobs. Ironically, I pressed for a meeting with the Chief Executive of the Baird

Group (the parent company of Bairdtex) and I shall be meeting Mr Jock Green Armytage next Wednesday here at Westminster. Although he was not prepared to save the Trawden operation I wanted to know, and I still want to know, what his plans are for manufacturing here in the UK."

The MP concluded: "Manufacturing is being stripped out of this country's economy. We can't find a job for everyone as hairdressers, insurance brokers or computer software writers."

For Immediate Release. Number: 70/96. Thurs 22 February 1996

PENDLE LIBERALS "WHOLLY UNPRINCIPLED" says MP

The war of words between local Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, and the Pendle Liberals erupted again today when the MP said a focus leaflet circulating in Marsden Ward was a scurrilous fabrication.

Speaking from Westminster the MP said: "The Liberals say they alone are responsible for this year's successful bid for Single Regeneration Budget cash "in spite of attacks from me"! The Leader of the Council is quoted as saying *"This is a brilliant coup for Pendle and for Nelson. It proves that Pendle Council went about the bid in exactly the right way - in spite of the attacks we had from Labour Councillors and the Labour MP."*

"These leaflets degrade our local politics when statements are made by the Liberals which they know to be wholly untrue. Those responsible are mendacious and unprincipled."

Note to Editors: On 19 April 1995, the MP said: "I don't want the Council simply to re-heat last year's offering and serve it up as fresh this time around. I want to see a new approach. I have told the Council that - as always - I stand ready to help if asked. There is a lot of money for Pendle riding on this bid and I don't want a repeat of last year's fiasco." In December 1994, the failure of the Liberal led Council's bid sparked a blazing row when leading Liberal councillors said the MP was to blame. It subsequently transpired that the MP's help had never been sought by the Council.

On 12 July 1995, he indicated his support for the new bid - led this time by Pendle Partnership saying:"We need to sell Pendle to the outside world. We need to shout about what we can offer. Above all, we need to be positive and forward looking. Pendle Partnership is the umbrella group - involving the council, local industries and others -

which is making a bid for cash from the Government's "Single Regeneration Budget". This year, I want everyone to pull together so we can bring it off and get money and resources into the area."

When news of the success of the bid came through the MP congratulated Pendle

more follows

PENDLE LIBERALS "UNPRINCIPLED" says MP

Council. On 12 December 1995, he said: "This is marvellous news indeed. It is a real tonic and will give a big boost to the entire area. My congratulations go to the Chairman of Pendle Partnership, Dennis Mendoros, to the local council and local businesses who have given such sterling support and, indeed, to everyone involved."

Key Quotes:

"I question whether our MP has been batting for Pendle on this, how hard, or how effectively... He seems to me to be a waste of time and he has proved himself on these matters."
Councillor Tony Greaves on the failed first round bid for SRB cash.
Leader Times 9 December 1994

"Pendle put in a bid a year ago and quite frankly it wasn't good enough."
David Curry MP, Environment Minister
Craven Herald 15 December 1995.

On his return from London, the Partnership Vice Chairman and Pendle Council leader Councillor Alan Davies praised the work of local MP Mr Gordon Prentice, who hosted the Kawasaki reception and spoke highly of the long traditions of the local workforce.
Nelson Leader on the (successful) second bid for SRB cash
21 July 1995

"The meeting was extremely useful in promoting Pendle's bid for cash from the Single Regeneration Budget."
Council Leader Alan Davies after his return from the House of Commons reception which paved the way for the (successful) second round bid for SRB cash.
Nelson Leader. 21 July 1995

"This is a brilliant coup for Pendle and for Nelson. It proves that Pendle Council went about the bid in exactly the right way - in spite of the attacks we had from Labour Councillors and the Labour MP."
Councillor Alan Davies
Marsden Ward Focus leaflet February 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 71/96. Wed 21 February 1996

"HONOUR OF PARLIAMENT" CHALLENGE FOR MONDAY'S VOTE

Local Conservative MPs have been challenged by Labour to "defend the honour of Parliament" in Monday's vote on the Scott Report.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said that it was imperative that all MPs of whatever Party rallied to defend Parliamentary democracy against the Ministerial abuses identified in Sir Richard Scott's 1,800 page report.

The Pendle MP challenged his two Conservative next door neighbours, Nigel Evans, MP for Ribble Valley, and David Curry from Skipton and Ripon to have the integrity to vote against the Government. This is a vote about integrity of Government and the rights of Parliament which has been cheated and abused by Ministers over the way Britain helped arm Saddam Hussein" he said.

Sir Richard Scott states: "Paragraph 27 of Questions of Procedure for Ministers identifies the duty to give Parliament... and the public as full information as possible about the policies, decisions and actions of the Government, and not to deceive or mislead Parliament and the public. In the course of the Inquiry example after example has come to light of an apparent failure by Ministers to discharge that obligation." He further adds, "A failure by Ministers to meet the obligation of Ministerial accountability ...undermines, in my opinion, the democratic process."

Mr Prentice added: "William Waldegrave has treated the principle of Ministerial accountability with total contempt and must now resign. Nicholas Lyell, the Attorney General, has been shown by Scott to be incompetent in giving legal advice that had no foundation in law, and he too must go."

For Immediate Release. Number: 72/96. Thur 22 February 1996

MP BLASTS GAS CHIEF OVER TAX WHEEZE

British Gas director, Richard Giordano, claims that having 40 per cent of his £450,000 a year salary paid in US dollars was aimed at avoiding "double taxation".

But the UK has a double taxation treaty with the USA, so there is little chance of income earned in this country being taxed in the US.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, observed: “This is just another example of the Tories' two nation Britain. The tiny elite at the top get special treatment, the rest of us have to pay for it.”

“For while the fat cat gets his cream, British Gas has admitted there has been ‘a deterioration in our services to customers’.”

The MP said: “People are rightly concerned about the remuneration of these monopoly privatised utility bosses. It is about time British Gas put its house in order.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 73/96. Wed 28 February 1996

LIBERAL FOCUS LEAFLET “UTTERLY UNTRUE” says MP

Claims made by the Liberal Leader of Pendle Council, Alan Davies, that the second round Single Regeneration Budget Bid - which will bring millions of pounds to the area - succeeded “in spite of the attacks” from the MP have been challenged by the MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP said: “A number of constituents have contacted me about this leaflet and I have now written to the Leader of the Council to establish the basis on which he made his remarks.”

Note to Editors: The following letter was sent on Monday 26 February to Councillor Alan Davies by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice:

“This leaflet was sent to me by a member of the public who lives in the Marsden Ward. This constituent is one of a number who have been in touch with me about the Marsden Ward February 1996 Focus leaflet.

The leaflet, as you know, details the second, successful, Single Regeneration Budget Bid. The text of the headline article (highlighted in yellow) together with the boxed comments make certain damaging suggestions about my attitude and involvement. These comments are untrue and I have passed a copy of the leaflet to my legal advisers.

I should be grateful if you would provide me with the following:

The suggested basis for your remarks;

The area of circulation of the Focus leaflet;

The wording for a retraction of the suggestion that I opposed the second round bid;

And, finally, your timetable for the circulation of a further leaflet correcting the libel.

I look forward to hearing from you by return.

For Immediate Release. Number: 74/96. Tues 27 February 1996

ROLLS ROYCE DELEGATION AT THE COMMONS

A delegation of shop stewards from the Rolls Royce plant at Barnoldswick will be meeting local MP, Gordon Prentice, at the Commons this Thursday.
The meeting is one of a regular series which allows the Rolls Royce unions an opportunity to discuss issues affecting the company with Labour MPs who have RR plants in their constituencies.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "These get togethers are extremely useful in getting an insight into what is happening industry wide. We have used the information gleaned from these meetings in the past to lobby the Government to take a more hands-on attitude to the aerospace industry. We could be talking about the problems of launch aid, new materials or the challenge from the fledgling aerospace industries on the Pacific Rim."

"We are all absolutely committed to the aerospace industry and to our local Rolls Royce plants. Supporting manufacturing industry is at the very top of the Opposition's agenda."

Note to Editors: The Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, Dr David Clark MP, visited the Barnoldswick plant last July with the local MP Gordon Prentice. They toured the "Front Bearing Housing" and the "Wide Chord Fan Blade" manufacturing units.

For Immediate Release. Number: 75/96. Tues 27 February 1996

TAX WHEEZES CONDEMNED BY PRENTICE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today told the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Michael Jack MP, to tighten up the loopholes which allow wealthy people to escape paying Inheritance Tax - because they allegedly allow the public access to their land or allow the public to view their "works of art".

The MP was speaking during the Committee stage of the Finance Bill which is examining the Budget proposals line by line. The Government is increasing the threshold from £154,000 to £200,000 beyond which Inheritance Tax becomes payable at 40%.

Prentice said: "The Prime Minister talks of abolishing Inheritance Tax to allow wealth "to cascade down the generations". Yet half the population own 92% of the country's wealth. Put another way, 50% own 8% of the wealth and this figure has remained static for decades."

The MP told the Committee: "Wealthy landowners get exemption from paying Inheritance Tax if they allow public access yet there is no requirement to publicise that access! In Lancashire six land owning individuals have been given this exemption but I don't know who they are or where their land is that I can supposedly walk over. A similar wheeze occurs with the exemption that is given to people who allow the public to view works of art they own."

"The tax laws are being abused and really do need tightening up. It really is the case that there is one law for the rich and another for the rest of us."

Note to Editors: Last year, the MP said wealthy people were being exempted from inheritance tax and capital transfer tax yet were making it next to impossible for members of the public to view their works of art - the justification for the original exemption. He said it was impossible to know how many members of the public had exercised this right because no central records were kept.

For Immediate Release. Number: 76/96. Tues 27 February 1996

FEWER JOBS AND HIGHER WELFARE BILLS says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told students at Lancaster University at the weekend that the Government owed young people a break.

The MP said: Young people leaving college and university face a bleak prospect with fewer jobs on offer. When I left university there were any number of jobs to go for. Now they are at a premium."

"There are over one million fewer jobs now than when John Major took office in November 1990."

"Unemployment is more than double the level inherited by the Conservatives in 1979, even excluding the 30 changes to the claimant count which the Government has made."

"Over a million people now earn less than £2.50 an hour and benefits to the low paid cost every taxpayer £100 a year."

"The number of people dependent on means-tested benefits has doubled from 1 in 12 in 1979 to 1 in 6 today."

"Mass unemployment under this Government is costing every taxpayer £20 a week. In Pendle, the cost to the exchequer since John Major has been Prime Minister is close to £125,000,000."

"And one of the most shocking statistics of the lot. One in five households of working age has no one earning a wage."

The MP was speaking to the University Labour Club at the launch of a low pay campaign to raise awareness of the problem in and around Lancaster.

For Immediate Release. Number: 77/96. Tues 28 February 1996

WALDEGRAVE STAYING ON IS "CONTEMPTIBLE" says MP

William Waldegrave, the man who misled Parliament over arms to Iraq, is to continue as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The Prime Minister has confirmed this.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Mr Waldegrave's record shows that he cannot be trusted to tell the truth about taxes - and no doubt the Tories will be telling whoppers about their own tax policies and inventing ours in the run up to the next General Election. By their vote last night, Conservative MPs have shown that they don't care whether he lied or not."

"William Waldegrave's public statements on the arms to Iraq affair were not true and he knows it. Sir Richard Scott instances countless cases where Waldegrave kept the truth to himself. Here are five examples out of many from the Scott report:

1. *"Mr Waldegrave knew, first hand, the facts that, in my opinion, rendered the 'no change in policy' statement untrue" (Ref D4.6)*
2. *"It is clear, in my opinion, that policy on defence sales to Iraq did not remain unchanged" (D4.6)*
3. *"The statement in the letters that 'The Government have not changed their policy on defence sales to Iran or Iraq' was untrue." (D4.5)*
4. *"The proposition that the Government's position over ' arms to Iran and Iraq' was 'evenhanded' had been untrue ever since the decision." (D4.7)*
5. *"The terms of Mr Waldegrave's letter... were, in my opinion, apt to mislead the reader as to the nature of the policy on export sales to Iraq that was currently being pursued by the Government. Mr Waldegrave was in a position to know that that was so." (D4.12)*

The Pendle MP said: "This is the man who is in charge of our taxes. At the last General Election, they said they would reduce taxes. Yet the Government has inflicted the biggest tax hike on the public in post war history. The typical family pays £650 more in taxes than it did in 1992."

For Immediate Release. Number: 78/96. Wed 28 February 1996

BAIRDTEX CHIEFS MEET MP AT COMMONS

The Chairman and Chief Executive of the William Baird Group - the parent company of the Trawden based Bairdtex - met local MP, Gordon Prentice, at the Commons today.

The MP, who is a member of the all party Cotton and Allied Textiles Group, called for the meeting in the wake of the Bairdtex closure which involved the loss in January of 129 jobs at Trawden.

The MP said: "Unfortunately, it was a case of closing the stable door after the horse had bolted and there was, realistically, no possibility of reversing the decision which hit Trawden like a bombshell. Weaving has all but disappeared from the UK. In 1991 there were 14,000 people

working in the textile weaving industry. By 1993, the numbers had shrunk to 13,200."

"Clearly, we need more information - and at an earlier stage - about the investment and business plans of our big employers. If we leave everything to crude market forces we won't be making anything here at all. We'll be importing everything from places such as China and Vietnam."

"Government has a role in supporting and encouraging our industries to compete worldwide. Yet this Government has, for its own perverse ideological reasons, allowed whole sections of manufacturing industry to go to the wall."

"The exchange rate of the pound against other currencies is absolutely crucial. Before the devaluation of September 1992 when the Government took Britain out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, many good firms simply disappeared. They couldn't sell their goods priced in overvalued sterling."

For Immediate Release. Number: 79/96. Wed 28 February 1996

PRENTICE BACKS LATE PAYMENT BILL

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a private members' bill aimed at giving businesses the right to charge interest when commercial debts are paid late. The Interest on Late Debts Bill will be considered for second reading this Friday, 1st March.

The bill, devised with the help of leading small firms campaigner - the Forum of Private Business - would give effective redress to late pay victims without the general need to use the courts or damage existing relationships.

This issue was highlighted earlier this month by the Deputy Prime Minister's admission that he was "skilful at stringing along the creditors".

Mr Heseltine had revealed that as a small business man he resorted to such tactics as posting cheques without all the necessary signatures, to delay payment, a confession that outraged not only small businesses, but also members of his own party.

If passed, Jon Owen Jones' bill would help thousands of small businesses who every year risk going to the wall because of the failure of other companies to pay up on time.

Whilst late payment is a problem for every business, larger companies can absorb such cash flow problems, but many smaller firms just do not have large enough operating margins to cope.

Speaking from Westminster, Mr Prentice said: "I am wholeheartedly in support of this measure. Late payment is a serious problem for small firms in my constituency and I challenge the Government to distance itself from such sharp practices as recounted by Mr Heseltine, and support this measure. "

more follows

LATE PAYMENT

Note to Editor

The Problem

The law of contract is being systematically broken without any effective action from Government. This leads to:

1. In extreme cases, the failure of the business
2. Difficulties for the business owner in planning future income
3. A huge waste of the owner's time spent chasing overdue debt
4. Reduced growth and employment potential
5. £20 billion of overdue debt (beyond the 30-day norm) owed to UK owner-managed firms
6. The UK being consistently bottom of the payment league in Europe

The solution

A statutory right to interest (SRI) on overdue debt at the discretion of the supplier. This would result in:

1. Improved payment periods
2. Very little need for business owners to use the courts
3. Very little need for business owners to issue an invoice to collect SRI, hence very little/no damage to customer/supplier relationships

The views of small firms

Recent surveys carried out by the FPB amongst its members reveal that:

1. Late payment has increased in priority for action, whilst other issues have diminished in importance
2. On average, business owners are owed twice as much as they owe (£124,644 against £62,335)
3. 80.6% want a statutory right to interest introduced.

The Government's record

This year's DTI competitiveness White Paper - 'Forging Ahead' - states "Government Departments have been instructed to abide by the CBI prompt payers' code and to publicise their payment practices". This code requires, amongst other things, for supporters to agree payment terms at the outset of a deal and stick to them.

Recent parliamentary questions asked by Barbara Roche MP reveal that the record of Government Departments is far from that ideal, with seven Departments alone paying £208 million worth of bills late in 1994/5 including: DSS £1.9m
ODA £55.356m; National Heritage £753,000; Treasury £1.6m

In percentage terms the worst culprit for late payment was the Treasury, paying 25% of its bills after the due date.

For Immediate Release. Number: 80/96. Thurs 29 February 1996

CHANNEL RAIL LINK BIDDERS GET "MUNIFICENT" PUBLIC SUBSIDY says PENDLE MP

London and Continental were today announced as the winners of the competition to build and run the high speed Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who served on the Select Committee examining the Bill, said: "The idea that this is purely private sector driven and financed is patently absurd. The successful consortium is to receive enormous public subsidies running into billions of pounds. There will be a straightforward subsidy of £1.4 billion plus debt write offs. Union Railways will be gifted to the consortium. All the land and property at Kings Cross and elsewhere will be added as further sweeteners totalling over £5 billion."

The Rail Link proposed by British Rail was vetoed in June 1990 by the then Transport Secretary, Cecil - now Lord - Parkinson. The subsidy required then totalled £1.9 billion and involved a low interest loan of £1 billion; a capital grant of £500 million and a further investment by Network South East of £400m. Now the Government is shovelling public money into the pockets of London and Continental who will own the new railway, lock, stock and barrel. Parkinson justified the earlier decision on the grounds that it was the Government's policy not to subsidise the rail link. Now years down the road, that is precisely what they doing."

"The decision to build an international station at Stratford is absolutely right. But why the Government did not agree the station a year ago and put it on the face of the Bill beats me. Stratford was the centrepiece of today's announcement - yet the Government couldn't make up its mind about the station - whether it was needed or not - until a year after the publication of the Bill."

For Immediate Release. Number: 81/96. Monday 4 March 1996

MP CALLS FOR ACTION ON KASHMIR

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, told a packed meeting of Pendle's "Kashmir Action Forum" that the killings and bloodshed in Indian occupied Kashmir had to stop. Speaking on Saturday evening at Brierfield's Community Centre, the MP said human rights abuses were commonplace. He wanted to see a United Nations supervised plebicite allowing Kashmiris to determine their own future.

The Kashmir Action Forum was set up just under a year ago to campaign for a just settlement for the people of Kashmir. It has lobbied Parlaiment on the issue, won the backing on Pendle Council, and, last year, met Shadow Foreign Affairs spokesman, Robin Cook MP.

Gordon Prentice said: "Kashmir is one of the world's blind spots - rather like the horrors of slavery in the Sudan. There are atrocities happening in Kashmir but the world's press turns a blind eye. We need to tell the public here in Pendle and elsewhere precisely what is going on. Many of my constituents have family and business connectiuons with that troubled land and they want to see people sit up and take notice."

The meeting - which was chaired by Pendle councillor Azhar Ali - also heard from the West Midlands academic, Professor Iqbal, Abdul Hamid from the Pakistan Vice Consulate in Manchester and Raja Najabat

Hussain from the Bradford based Kashmir Centres Europe. The MP promised Kashmir would be at the top of an incoming Labour Government's foreign policy agenda.

Note to Editors: On 27th October 1947 Indian troops occupied most of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and 49 years later those occupying forces still remain. The MP has called on the Government to support the United Nations Resolutions of 1948,1949 and 1960 which upheld the rights of the Kashmiri people to self-determination through a United Nations supervised plebiscite. This would fulfil the explicit commitment made to the people of Kashmir by Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India.
more follows

MP CALLS FOR ACTION ON KASHMIR

Last month, the Pendle MP quizzed Foreign Office Minister, Jeremy Hanley in the Commons over the latest atrocity. The MP, who is a member of the Parliamentary All Party Kashmir Group, asked the Minister if he could shed any light on who was responsible for the missile attack on Kahuta - a border town in Azad Kashmir - which destroyed a mosque killing 18 people. Among the dead were young children. Many were injured. Officials from the UN Military Observers Group visited the area and the MP wanted to know what reports had been received from the UN.

Prentice told the Minister: "This appalling attack which happened at the end of January and the other attacks on prominent leaders of the All Parties Hurriyet Conference make it very difficult if not impossible to move forwards to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Kashmir. Those responsible must be tracked down and brought to book."

For Immediate Release. Number: 82/96. Monday 4 March 1996

MP RIDICULES TORY RECORD ON THE ECONOMY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has savaged the Government's record on the economy in the wake of the cascade of job losses in Pendle over recent months. Today's economic debate - the first to be called by the Government for months - is a sign that the Tories are preparing to fight back on the central issue of the economy and how well it is performing.

Gordon Prentice said: "Kenneth Clark's bluster went down like a lead balloon. There is certainly little sign of any feel-good factor in Pendle

where so many of my constituents are now facing unemployment after closures at Bairdtex and job losses at Carrington Viyella and now Albert Hartleys."

"The Government's record on the economy is woeful. After 17 years Britain has fallen from 13th to 18th in the World Prosperity League; manufacturing investment is lower than in 1979; taxes are at record levels and the number of people dependent on means-tested benefits has doubled. Whatever claims the Government tries to make, on every issue they are undermined by the real facts about their record of economic failure."

"The Government claims the UK is the 'Enterprise Capital of Europe'. This is flatly contradicted by the facts. Average growth under the Tories has been the fifth lowest of the 18 countries in the G7 and the EU; the UK is now 35th in the world education league, according to the world economic forum; the UK's share of world trade is at its lowest this century and growth has been lower than in any other period in Britain's postwar history - just 1.9% a year on average."

"The truth is that since 1979 Britain has fallen down the World Prosperity League. If that's success, what's failure?" queried the Pendle MP.

For Immediate Release. Number: 83/96. Tuesday 5 March 1996

LABOUR UNVEILS ITS HOUSING POLICY

The launch today of Labour's new housing policy has been hailed by local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says action on the ground by an incoming Labour Government will breathe new life into Pendle's housing market.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "The Government has failed homeowners by failing to tackle negative equity and cutting mortgage income tax relief twice after promising not to. And despite the Prime Minister's claims that repossessions have stopped, they continue at a rate of 1,000 a week."

The MP continued: "We want to see a further development of flexible "lifestyle mortgages" already offered by some building societies that allow the size of payments to fluctuate. We want to promote imaginative solutions to the problems of serious debt and alternatives to repossessions such as the project developed by Bradford and Bingley. The building society lent housing associations funds to buy

properties of members in serious arrears and negative equity and allowed the old owners to remain as tenants."

"On the rented side, we want to see local authority tenants involved in every stage of design, building and maintenance. And we want to develop the role of housing associations in partnership with the private sector and with councils to ensure diversity in the provision of rented housing."

"People are being made homeless. Others are overcrowded or living in places unfit for human habitation. Here in Pendle we have the oldest housing stock in the North West - a lot of it in dreadful condition. Yet this Government has cut house building back to its lowest level for 50 years."

For Immediate Release. Number: 84/96. Wed 7 March 1996

PAY MORE, GET LESS IN PENDLE

"A new survey has confirmed the Opposition's warnings that the Government is determined to force through big rises in Council Tax and cuts in services this year. People will be expected to pay more, but get less." says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

"The survey by the highly respected Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has confirmed that Council Taxes everywhere are likely to go up again this year. At the same time services may have to be cut. Pendle Council tax payers have been told to expect increases of at least 5% - double the rate of inflation."

"Our local council is struggling to make ends meet but so too is Lancashire County Council. They are in the same boat. The Government has cut the amount of money it is giving to local councils as part of a deliberate strategy vo force councils to push up the Council Tax. So any benefit from a reduction in Income Tax will be virtually wiped out by increases in Council Tax. It is a typical case of the Tories giving with one hand, but taking away with the other."

"But that's not all. The Government has also rigged the way local councils are funded so that money is poured into Tory Westminster at the expense of places like Pendle. If Pendle Council got the same help from the Government as Tory Westminster, people wouldn't have to pay any Council Tax at all! Instead the Council could send out refunds of £584. What a racket."

For Immediate Release. Number: 85/96. Tues 5 March 1996

MP WARNS OF DANGERS OF CHANNEL COLLISION

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told a Commons Committee today that swift action should be taken to minimise the dangers of a collision between ships in the English Channel. The MP said the Sea Empress grounding on the Pembrokeshire Coast - with the environmental catastrophe that has occurred - was a stark reminder of what can happen when things go wrong.

The MP said: "We have the absurd situation where the Coastguard's National Contingency Plan is secret so no-one can be certain it has its priorities right. If we had been able to see the plan before the Sea Empress disaster then perhaps people would have pressed for a tug at Milford Haven when the tanker first got into difficulties. Most of the oil imported into Britain for refining goes through that port."

"Last year there were 37 collisions around our coasts. This is only 0.6% of all the emergencies handled by the coastguard but the consequences can carry a heavy price."

"The Channel is one of the most heavily used sea lanes in the world and the traffic separation has to be perfect - especially when there are ferries criss crossing the sea lanes hourly. I am concerned the Coastguard Agency is given the resources to enable it to do the job. The number of full time people employed by the agency has fallen from 561 in 1994/5 to 538 in 1995/6."

"People are angry and upset at the appalling damage that has been done to the wildlife, fish and other sea creatures and to the beautiful Pembrokeshire Coast."

Note to Editors: MPs were considering the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996.

For Immediate Release. Number: 86/96. Wed 6 March 1996

COLD COMFORT FOR PENDLE says MP

Pendle is now enduring its fourth spell of cold weather this winter and local MP, Gordon Prentice, is furious that Government cuts is making it more difficult for people to keep warm. "Pendle in winter can shiver your timbers" said the MP.

The MP said: “With these bouts of freezing weather there has been a growing demand for the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES). Instead of celebrating the fact they have a scheme that helps people and makes economic sense the Government is to cut back the scheme from £100 million to £69 million next year. There will be changes in the eligibility rules which means that people over the age of 60 who are not in receipt of a means-tested benefit will only qualify for 25% grant aid from the beginning of next month (1 April 1996).”

Ministers have said they would honour all applications made on or before 31 March 1996 from those over 60 who will not subsequently be eligible. The charity National Energy Action is predicting a backlog of over 200,000 claims. This will absorb over 50% of the HEES budget before the start of the next financial year. The MP said: “Resources are being directed away from the most vulnerable households which Government stated it would protect.”

Note to Editors: the Pendle MP is backing the following Commons motion: That this House deeply regrets the Government's decision to remove £31 million from the budget of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; is concerned that the budget cut will mean the loss of over 1,000 jobs and result in almost 200,000 fewer homes being assisted in the next year; recognises the unique contribution of this scheme in bringing social, economic, environmental and employment benefits; is aware that changes to eligibility within the scheme will deny assistance to many thousands of people on a low-income; and calls on the Government to reverse its decision and maintain the budget of £100 million next year.

For Immediate Release. Number: 87/96. Wed 6 March 1996

NHS ‘BETRAYED’ says PENDLE MP

The sale of the liver to Spain of teenage ecstasy drug victim Leah Betts has cast a dreadful cloud over the NHS says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: “Yesterday's damning revelations of the “Inquiry into the care and treatment of Nicholas Geldard” and the sale of Leah Betts’ liver to Spain shows the extent of the Government’s betrayal of the NHS. It happened despite the fact that British patients are dying because the facilities in the UK are not there to carry out transplant operations. The Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, chose to blame managers, but it is his own policies that are at fault.”

Gordon Prentice commented “Nothing can undo the grief and suffering Nicholas Geldard's parents are facing. But the Government must learn lessons from the tragedy of Nicholas's death ... No-one reading this report could see it as anything other than an indictment of the state of the NHS under this Government.”

The inquiry found that the number of patients who cannot be admitted to paediatric intensive care beds is too high and must be reduced. It criticised the way that Nicholas's parents were treated. It recommended that parents should be able to accompany their children in ambulances. And it called for an effective and prompt reorganisation and improvement of regional services such as neuroscience and specialist services such as paediatrics.

The MP said: “Government pressure for so called "greater efficiency" led to failures that must be rectified. We need regional planning of intensive care beds, a central computer system to aid that planning and prompt action to raise morale among NHS nursing staff.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 88/96. Wed 6 March 1996

A TALE OF TWO PARTIES

John Redwood and Malcolm Rifkind are slugging the Europe fight out in the media today according to local MP,Gordon Prentice, who confessed to being astonished when listening to the exchanges on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme this morning.

Prentice said: “In a speech last night Malcolm Rifkind proposed that a senior civil servant at the European Commission take responsibility for coordinating European Foreign policy. This morning, would be Conservative Prime Minister, John Redwood, was critical. He said: "It is very dangerous, I hope Malcolm Rifkind will not continue with it.”

“In the same programme Malcolm Rifkind's response was scathing: “I think he (John Redwood) has gone over the top on this particular occasion, perhaps he hasn't understood what is intended.... there are some people (in my party) who will make a knee jerk reaction to any proposal even if it is a sensible proposal”.

Prentice observed: “The Conservative Party is coming apart at the seams. Tory MP, Peter Temple Morris spoke with honesty when he declared in the Guardian today: “We became in a sense two parties... and we still remain in that state today”.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 89/96. Wed 6 March 1996

MP PUSHES FOR ROLLS ROYCE RB211 RUSSIAN DEAL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, pressed Ministers in the Commons today to back the proposed contract to fit Rolls Royce RB211 engines to the Russian Tupolev 204 aircraft. The MP was speaking in Committee examining the new Civil Aviation Act (Investigation of Accidents) Regulations 1996.

The MP said: "I have heard alarming stories of poorly maintained Yak and similar aircraft from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe being hired for charters taking people to Mediterranean destinations. This raises very serious questions indeed about safety checks and airworthiness."

"I pressed the Minister, Steven Norris, to back Rolls Royce whose RB211 has an unparalleled safety and performance record. If these engines were fitted to aircraft from the former Soviet Union - and there were proper checks on the airframe and avionics - my concerns would disappear overnight."

"The DTI Minister, Tim Eggar, also told me today that the Export Credits Guarantee Department has invited the Russian Ministry of Finance to nominate the RB211 for the Tupolev planes as a priority for ECGD cover."

"The industry is relying on Government help and support. About time too. Over recent years the amount of help given through "launch aid" has shrivelled alarmingly."

Launch Aid

Year	Payments £m	Receipts £m
1990/1	141.1	51.8
1991/2	78.7	83.0
1992/3	31.4	74.7
1993/4	0.6	56.9
1994/5	2.0	47.0

For Immediate Release. Number: 90/96. Thurs 7 March 1996

ROYAL TRAIN HITS THE BUFFERS

The Royal Train is a luxury the nation can no longer afford according to Labour MP for Pendle, Gordon Prentice. Figures unearthed by the MP show that it costs £136.30p per mile to run.

The MP said: “The Royal Train - which is now opperated by the American company, Wisconsin Central - is a rarely used but quaint relic of the past. Last year, the train was used 8 times by the Queen, 14 times by the Prince of Wales and on 10 other occasions by the Duke of Edinburgh, the Princess Royal and the Duchess of Kent.”

“The train costs £136.30p per mile to run when a member of the Royal Family is on board or when it is being positioned. This figure includes £21.30 operating costs and £115 per mile for overheads, maintenance and security. When the train is not at work it is kept at a secure location in Buckinghamshire.”

“The train hardly has an energetic schedule yet is is serviced by no less than 11 full time and 4 part time staff. These do not include staff employed by Railtrack, rail express systems and other companies who do work related to the royal train in addition to their normal duties.”

The MP added: “BR used to urge us to “Let the Train Take the Strain”. Unlike the rest of the nation’s trains, the Royal Train has a pretty easy life.”

“If a member of the Royal Family wants to travel by train I am sure appropriate arrangements could be made. Surely we don’t need a special train to sit in a siding most of the year when it could be doing something useful.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 91/96. Friday 8 March 1996

MP LAUNCHES CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL GPs

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will next week be consulting all GPs in Pendle on Labour's plans for the future of the family doctor service.

The MP said: “The GPs here are providing vital health care. They are in touch with their patients and they know what is going on. But the Government never seems to listen to them. I want to hear what our local GPs are saying about how they are improving their services; about the problems they are facing and how GP care should be developed.”

The MP’s letter to GPs will set out the framework for Labour's plans for primary care. The MP pledged: “All GPs will have a say in shaping local

hospital services. They will have equal access for their patients to hospital services. They can innovate and develop the services they provide to their patients. And GPs will play a part in the local health strategy for improving health of local people."

The MP continued: "Under our plans all GPs can choose which NHS hospital to refer their patient to. It will put an end to the divisiveness and unfairness which comes with some GPs being fundholders and others not. Our objectives are clear, but further consultation is important as we put flesh on the bones of our plans."

"This initiative is part of Labour's national consultation of GPs and will ensure that GPs in Pendle have a direct say in the future of primary care under Labour."

Note to Editors: The three central principles of Labour's proposed scheme for the development of GP Commissioning care are: partnership, information for all GPs and freedom of referral.

Labour's proposals are built on the principle of partnership. Partnership between GPs and health authorities requires trust. In some areas that still needs to be developed. Labour believes that there should be no return to the situation

where health authorities are commissioning care with no input from GPs.

A diversity of Commissioning models are emerging on the ground. We welcome that. We do not want to impose a single solution from the centre. Different models will be appropriate for different areas. If they fit NHS objectives and are shown to work they will be encouraged. GP Commissioning is one of the great success stories of the NHS:

• an innovation led by GPs which has grown from a handful of local groups to 100 Commissioning groups covering 14 million people, a quarter of the population

• a partnership approach which involves all GPs and health authorities - an idea which has been generated by GPs and not imposed on them.

It is an inclusive idea which draws GPs together and fosters co-operation, not a dogmatic and divisive one which sets GPs in competition with each other. Labour will build on the wealth of

experience commissioning groups have in bringing health authorities and GPs together.

In adjusting to our Commissioning based process we will avoid disruption in the delivery of patient care. We will consult widely particularly with GPs and their representatives, as to how this can best be achieved - but there are some obvious steps:

• the GP fundholding scheme would cease to accept new applications
• Commissioning schemes appropriate to each district would be developed
• we would seek to provide fair funding for all General Practices
• freedom of referral would be restored to all GPs

There will be a diversity of Commissioning schemes, within common principles.

All local models of commissioning must ensure that:
• innovation is recognised and encouraged
• all patients have access to treatment on the basis of need
• all GPs have the same access to hospitals for their patients
• fair funding for all GPs
• all GPs have access to information about hospital services
• all GPs work towards the public health plans of the community which they have been involved in drawing up
• bureaucracy is minimised

Population size, local needs, current practice, the aptitude of GPs and their willingness to become involved at different levels are all factors which must be taken into account when deciding the most appropriate scheme for a given population. But our system of GP Commissioning will be established by consent within different areas and should run on reciprocal trust, but it will also need to have some teeth. Health authorities will not be able to commission healthcare without the explicit consent and involvement of local GPs.

Under the new system co-operation will be built in from the start.

For Immediate Release. Number: 92/96. Monday 11 March 1996

MP URGES TAX BREAKS FOR FOOTBALL GROUND IMPROVEMENTS

The National Lottery is responsible for a catastrophic slump in the amount of money going to football grounds to improve and update the

facilities according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. On Tuesday (12 March) he will tell the Standing Committee examining the Finance Bill that the collapse in income going to the Football Trust is holding back vital ground improvements in the North West and nationwide.

The MP will say: “Football clubs are trying hard to implement the recommendations of the Taylor Report but the Lottery is casting a long shadow. The Football Trust’s main task is to help league clubs implement the Taylor recommendations on new grounds, new stands, seating and roofing. The Trust provides the only grant support available for this vital work and yet the Trust is now fighting with one hand tied behind its back.”

“The Football Trust's main source of income is the proceeds of the 2.5% reduction in pool betting duty announced in the 1990 Budget which increases to 3% from 1 May. In the year before the national lottery was set up the Trust received £23m from this source. In 1996/97 the best they can hope for is £16m.”

“The Trust also get a donation from Littlewoods Spot the Ball competition. This used to produce some £14m a year. Now it has collapsed to £4.5m.”

“My new clause would allow people who make donations to clubs for football ground improvements to offset this against tax.”

Note to Editors: The Football Trust was founded in 1975 through an initiative by the pools companies, Littlewoods, Vernons and Zetters. It has two main sources of income, both pools derived. The first is Littlewoods Spot the Ball and the other is the proceeds of the reduction in the pool betting duty.

FOOTBALL GROUND IMPROVEMENTS

The Trust receives about 14% of its income from the home countries football associations; most of this comes from the Football Association. By agreement with the Revenue the donations made by the Football Association to the Trust are treated as a trading expense and are therefore tax deductible.

The Pendle MP’s new clause seeks to extend this tax treatment to donations to the Trust from any party in football. Of particular significance in this regard is the Premier League. The Football Trust hopes that the Premier League will continue to make donations to the Trust which can then be used to help clubs - and not only in the Premier League - provide safe and comfortable grounds. In this way,

money from the wealthiest clubs will be used to fund capital projects at their grounds and also at the grounds of the smaller clubs in the lower divisions whose needs are greatest and means the least.

The proposed new clause will provide a tax incentive to encourage the Premier League and any other football organisation to make donations to the Trust to improve spectator safety and amenity at football grounds.

For Immediate Release. Number: 93/96. Monday 11 March 1996

SMALL BUSINESSES BETRAYED BY GOVERNMENT says PRENTICE

The Prime Minister's speech earlier today on the problems facing small businesses has been ridiculed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP said: "The Prime Minister wants people to believe he is throwing small businesses a lifeline - but who put them into difficulties in the first place?"

"57% of small businesses say economic stability should be the Government's top priority. Yet the Government's economic failure has led to the failure of countless small firms. In Barnoldswick, where I live, there are any number of empty shops which used to be home to thriving businesses."

"41% wanted legislation against late payment of debt. Yet British businesses are owed £232m in late bills by Government departments. The Treasury paid 25% of its bills late in the last financial year. And we know what the Deputy Prime Minister thinks about late payment - do it so long as you can get away with it seems to be the motto of his business career."

"35% wanted taxes reduced but the biggest tax bombshell for businesses and the self employed is the £850m extra tax arising from the changeover to self assessment."

"31% wanted a lighter regulatory burden yet an extra 1,000 statutory instruments were passed in the year to February 1995. I know because I sit on the Committee which is supposed to monitor this legislative torrent. The whole thing is a bad joke."

Note to Editors: The survey referred to is the British Chamber of Commerce Small Firms Survey of October 1995.

For Immediate Release. Number: 94/96. Wed 13 March 1996

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit in Pendle has shot up again to the highest figure for six months. In February, 2,241 people were unemployed (6.1%) compared with 2,179 in January (5.9%).

8.1% of men were out of work (1,711) and 3.4% of women (530). There were 186 vacancies at the Job Centre in Nelson and 87 vacancies at Colne. Nationally, unemployment rose last month by 6,800 to 2,213,600.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Recent events in Pendle show all too clearly that many people are hanging on to their jobs by their fingertips. Job insecurity has become a way of life for millions of people."

"This insecurity has been fuelled by a record increase in taxes, falling living standards and a collapse in the housing market. Since the last election 8.7 million people have experienced one or more spells of unemployment. One in three men have experienced a spell of unemployment since the last election, while over 1 million men have experienced three or more spells of unemployment over the same period. Since the last election 2.9 million women have experienced at least one spell of unemployment. One in five households of working age has nobody in work."

The MP added: "Once people fall out of secure employment they often become part of an acutely insecure labour market with a massive increase in part-time and temporary employment. Over half those currently unemployed were in their last job for less than a year before claiming unemployment benefits again."

"There has been a 42% increase in temporary employment since the general election while full-time work has fallen."

For Immediate Release. Number: 95/96. Wed 13 March 1996

MP SLAMS SKY HIGH CHARGES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves in the House of Commons to force Sky TV to rethink their charges to sports and social clubs.

The MP said: “There has been a steep increase in subscription fees charged by Sky to sports and social clubs. Amazingly, the new fees are based on the non-domestic rateable value of the whole of a club’s premises even though the area where the television is available may comprise only a small part of the total floor area.”

“Many sports and social clubs are non-profit making members’ clubs paying commercial rent for their premises and this is just another unwelcome burden they can do without.”

“Clearly, it would be a lot fairer if Sky were to charge on the basis of the floor area of the club where the TV can actually be viewed.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 96/96. Wed 13 March 1996

NUCLEAR PRIVATISATION “A DECEIT AND DECEPTION”

The privatisation of the nuclear industry - which is to go ahead this summer - is a “deceit and deception” of the British people according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

During Trade and Industry questions this afternoon, the Pendle MP told Energy Minister, Tim Eggar, the Government had no mandate for the sale. He asked the Minister why there was no explicit reference to nuclear privatisation in the Conservatives’ 1992 manifesto but only a reference to a “review”. The MP said it was all the more worrying given reports that the industry, worth £2.5 billion, could go to the American company Duke Power whose record on safety matters the MP claimed was notorious.

Speaking afterwards, Prentice commented: “Without an explicit electoral mandate, the Government has no right to sell off Britain’s nuclear industry while keeping the old, clapped out, Magnox power stations in the public sector. Nuclear power is far too sensitive to hand over to any Tom, Dick or Harry just to get cash to cut taxes before the General Election.”

Note to Editors: The flotation of British Energy is scheduled for summer and will be a bad deal for the taxpayer. Even if the Government raises the £2.5bn which it wants to pay off the remaining public Magnox liabilities, this will not compensate the taxpayer for the loss of a revenue stream as the modern reactors move into profit for the first time; the £3bn invested to build Sizewell B; the £25 million

thus far spent on advisers and consultants to the sale and any liabilities which do not get privatised.

On 21 February, the DTI confirmed that it had was considering "indirect indication of interest" in a trade sale of British Energy to the US company Duke Power. Duke Power admitted paying employees in 'silence for money' contracts to stop them from reporting safety hazards. The company does not recognise Trade Unions in the US.

For Immediate Release. Number: 97/96. Wed 13 March 1996

GOVERNMENT WORKING HARD TO MISREPRESENT WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE says PENDLE MP

The Government has launched an all out attack on the European Working Time Directive relying on crude misrepresentation and distortion of the facts says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "The Government wants everyone to believe this Directive would prevent anyone from working more than 48 hours. That is nonsense and the Government knows it."

"The Directive does not stop anyone working more than 48 hours from doing so. They could work 78 hours a week - or any other number of hours -if that was their choice. But it stops employers from forcing people to work more than 48 hours if they don't want to."

"Labour believes that workers should have the right to refuse to work more than 48 hours a week but, in line with the Directive, we believe they should have the choice to work to work longer - even much longer - if that is their wish."

"Why is this seen as being so unreasonable? Does this Government believe any employer should be able to demand his or her employees work, for example, round the clock? Where would the Conservatives draw the line?"

For Immediate Release. Number: 98/96. Thurs 14 March 1996

MP CLAIMS LINK BETWEEN VIOLENT CRIME AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

In an angry clash in the Commons earlier today, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, there was a direct

connection between violent crime and high levels of youth unemployment. The MP said the link between unemployment and crime - denied for years by Conservative MPs - had been recognised by the Government for the first time in this year's Police Grant which allocates money to police authorities based on factors including the number of unemployed men under 25."

Prentice said afterwards: "Conservatives have always denied the link between unemployment and crime for the simple reason that they have used unemployment as a deliberate instrument of economic policy. We were told unemployment was a price well worth paying. Now we are paying the price for policies which allow so many young people to hang around street corners with nothing to do with their time."

"The Government's unemployment policies are literally criminal."

Note to Editors: The Home Office Research Study "Trends in Crime and their Interpretation", published in 1990, showed that offences of violence against the person had a distinctive relation with unemployment. In the same report violence against the person was found to be strongly correlated to unemployment during the preceding year and was also found to be affected by the level of unemployment benefit, although obviously unemployment is not the sole cause of crime.

A more recent study "Young People and crime" from the Home Office Research and Planning Unit found that there was a higher rate of offenders from single parent families which they found to be statistically associated with "less parental supervision, a greater likelihood of a poor relationship with at least one parent and greater poverty."

For Immediate Release. Number: 99/96. Thurs 14 March 1996

MP WINS DEBATE ON CASTLE CEMENT AND CEMFUEL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to put the controversial issue of the burning of cemfuel by Castle Cement at Clitheroe under the microscope in a special adjournment debate next Wednesday (20 March).

As chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee, the MP has taken a close interest in the issue. Last September the MP attended a public meeting in Clitheroe called by the group "Residents against Toxic Substances". He has visited the plant and held meetings with the cement association and Friends of the Earth.

The MP said: “Although Castle Cement is next door in Ribble Valley I have a clear interest. Smoke and fumes do not respect lines on maps. This is a serious issue and I shall be looking for a detailed response from Government Ministers next Wednesday."

“Last June, the House of Commons Environment Select Committee issued a report on the burning of Cemfuel. The report proposed strict tests and monitoring before the fuel is given the all clear to be burned in cement kilns. Nine months later we are still waiting for the Government’s official response. This kind of delay is unprecedented.”

Note to Editors: In February 1995, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. The consultation period ended on 29 March. In June, the House of Commons Environment Committee published a report making the following recommendations:

BURNING OF SECONDARY LIQUID FUEL IN CEMENT KILNS

1. We have received considerable amounts of written evidence on the burning of Secondary Liquid Fuel in cement kilns, and have questioned witnesses representing the cement, waste management and solvent blending industries, as well as Friends of the Earth, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution and the Department of the Environment. Having considered with great care the evidence
CASTLE CEMENT AND CEMFUEL

presented to us, much of which is published with this Report, we have reached the following conclusions.

2. We recommend that the Government formally classify Secondary Liquid
Fuel (SLF) as waste (if necessary, by amending the law) thus applying the Duty of Care to all shipments of SLF to kilns and formally bringing the burning of SLF in kilns within the scope of the E U Hazardous Waste Incineration Directive.

3. If the burning of SLF is to continue, HMIP must enforce their own standards more effectively, and not be put off by commercial arguments such as the possible termination of contracts. For example, trials should be limited in duration and should not be allowed to continue unless the conditions of the HMIP Protocol can be complied with.

4. Were commend that the adaptation of kilns to burn SLF should be designated a "substantial change" under Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, thus requiring a new authorisation.

5. We strongly recommend that as a minimum HMIP apply additional controls to ensure that the emissions from burning coal plus SLF are no more polluting than those from burning coal alone. This would mean that:
the specification for SLF should be tightened up so that it is a cleaner fuel than coal, in terms of metals content etc, and/or
effective abatement technology should be fitted, in order to trap the emissions which currently escape during kiln upsets.

6. There is much evidence to suggest that the monitoring data collected so far is not of sufficient quality for any firm conclusions to be drawn on the environmental impact of burning SLF.We urge HMIP to ensure that future monitoring exercises take into account the full range of kiln operating conditions and that monitoring be carried out whilst fuel of the "worst " allowable specification is being burned. The number of samples taken must be sufficient to ensure that the results are statistically significant.We also recommend that "baseline" conditions be comprehensively monitored before any further trials commence.

7. We recommend that HMIP carry out a more detailed analysis of the precipitator dust from kilns which burn SLF and its potential to contaminate soils and ground water. If it is found to be an environmental hazard, it should be reclassified as Special Waste, which would bring it under a strict regulatory regime. We also recommend that HMIP take immediate action to tackle the more general pollution problems associated with kilns.

8. We urge the cement industry and HMIP to ensure that local residents are properly informed and given the opportunity to express their views on the burning of SLF.

9. We recommend that the Government carry out a thorough survey of human and animal health in the vicinity of the kilns (both those burning SLF and those burning only coal) in order to establish or disprove the alleged links between kiln pollution and health effects.

For Immediate Release. Number: 100/96. 19 March 1996

MP CALLS FOR HAND GUN BAN

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to ban hand guns from being anywhere other than at licensed gun clubs.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: “After the terrible tragedy at Dunblane there can be no conceivable reason why hand guns should be kept at someone’s home. These lethal weapons should be kept securely under lock and key at rifle and gun clubs.”

“I shall be supporting moves to tighten up gun control including psychological testing if needs be.”

“I also want to see the House of Commons gun club closed down and the space given over to a creche. It is astonishing that Parliament can find space for a gun club but not for a creche.”

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 101/96. 19 March 1996

1 IN 3 CHILDREN LIVE IN HOUSEHOLDS DEPENDENT ON BENEFITS says MP

One in three children in Britain live in households dependent on benefit, compared to one in ten in 1979 according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says another official “shock statistic” shows one in five households with people of working age have no-one earning a wage.

The MP was speaking at Westminster earlier today at a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party’s Treasury Committee. The MP said: “The rise in council taxes, business rates, VAT on fuel and the “galaxy” of other new taxes have put a crushing burden on the nation’s taxpayers. “In Pendle, business rates have been the death knell for so many small businesses. They do not distinguish between high volume trading such as McDonalds and something like a craft shop.”

“Taxes have gone up in Pendle as elsewhere because the Conservatives have failed to run the economy successfully. Britain has slumped from 13th to 18th in World Prosperity League since 1979. The UK's share of world trade is predicted to slump to its lowest point this century under this Government. The UK is 21st in the International Investment League. The UK is rated 35th out of 48 in the World Education League, and we have the smallest proportion of young people in full-time education in Europe.”

“The Government is borrowing over £2 billion every month - the equivalent of more than £1,000 for every person with a job in Britain. Policies - such as cuts in mortgage tax relief - damage economic confidence. Housing repossessions are still running at almost 1,000 a week.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 102/96. Wed 20 March 1996

MP URGES CRACKDOWN ON CAR TAX DODGERS

The North West has the highest percentage of unlicensed vehicles on the road of any region in England according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims 3.7% of all private and light goods vehicles are on the road without a tax disk. In the UK as a whole only Wales has a higher rate of tax dodgers at 4%.

Later today, the MP will tell the Committee examining the Vehicle Excise Duty (Immobilisation, Removal and Disposal of Vehicles) Regulations 1996 that the proposals for cracking down on tax dodgers in parts of London should be extended nationwide.

The MP said: “These new regulations are good so far as they go by why on earth are they not being extended nationwide? According to the National Audit Office, the problem in the North West is greater than London (3.3% untaxed) and evasion across the country is costing an arm and a leg. The revenue lost as a result of evasion is about £163m a year. As a proportion of all Vehicle Excise Duty revenue, the amount lost has risen from 3.5% in 1984 to 4.1% in 1994/5.”

“Incredibly, 371,000 motorcycles on the road are unlicensed. This is 34.9% of the total. £12m revenue is lost as a result.”

ends

Note to Editors: The percentage of unlicensed private and light goods vehicles in Yorkshire and Humberside is 3.0%

For Immediate Release. Number: 103/96. 19 March 1996

GOVERNMENT ACCUSED OF WASHING ITS HANDS OF YORKSHIRE WATER

The Government is refusing to take any responsibility whatsoever for the water crisis which affected the Yorkshire Water area last summer

says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Pendle sits astride the North West Water and Yorkshire Water areas.

The Pendle MP is one of 90 supporting a Commons motion calling on the Environment Secretary to give evidence to the public inquiry - which started in Leeds yesterday - into the circumstances surrounding the water shortage.

The MP said: “It is an absolute disgrace that the Government can wash its hands of the matter. Thousands of my constituents who pay their water bills to Yorkshire Water as I do want to know what went wrong and what is being done to make sure last summer’s fiasco doesn’t happen again. We are told last summer was exceptionally dry. Well, last winter was exceptionally wet! The UK isn’t Saudi Arabia. We get lashings of rain year in year out.”

Note to Editors: The Commons motion reads: That this House calls on the Secretary of State to explain why neither the Department of the Environment nor the Water Regulator will be participating in or giving evidence to the Public Inquiry which opened in Leeds on Monday 18th March, into Yorkshire Water's management of the water system last summer and in previous years; believes that the absence of proper evidence from two of the major players in the matter undermines the credibility of the whole inquiry; further believes that this is an attempt to absolve OFWAT and the Government from all responsibility for faults which might be uncovered by the inquiry; recognises that the Water Regulator's duties include undertaking assessments of each company's asset management plans, and monitoring leakage control; finds quite unacceptable the reason given that the Regulator is undertaking his own confidential investigation on his own; and demands to know why Parliament has not been informed about this private inquiry.

For Immediate Release. Number: 104/96. 19 March 1996

PRENTICE BACKS INQUIRY INTO NATIONAL LOTTERY

The National Lottery could leave a trail of half finished projects in its wake according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the difficulty in raising matching funds could could dash the hopes of communities around the country who look to the lottery to provide much needed local facilities.

Speaking after the launch of Labour's inquiry into the National Lottery, the MP said: "In my own area, we are having tremendous difficulty in getting the matching finance needed to built the two new sports halls at West Craven and Brierfield. Local people have made enormous efforts but the sums of money we have to find are enormous."

"There is a lack of strategic long term vision from government as to what the Lottery could do for Britain over the next few decades and how it could be improved."

"Labour's Inquiry will comprehensively analyse the wide-ranging effects of the lottery. It will recommend possible changes to the way the lottery is run and how the proceeds are equitably and efficiently distributed by a new Labour government. I want anyone in Pendle who has a view on these matters to contact my colleague, Dr Jack Cunningham at the House of Commons. The Inquiry will examine each and every proposal with care."

"Problems have already been identified by research studies, such as the danger of projects being left unfinished because of problems with matching funding. The Lottery can also distort local authority priorities. Put crudely, council cash goes to back up the projects that have been successful in getting lottery cash in the first place - perhaps at the expense of other things. These issues must be urgently addressed, particularly in the case of Millennium funding, to prevent enormous amounts of money being wasted on half-finished monuments to the Millennium."
more follows

PRENTICE BACKS INQUIRY INTO NATIONAL LOTTERY

"The National Lottery has been successful in raising money and I welcome that. But I want the Inquiry to look at the lottery's performance over its first year, and address the problems and concerns which have been encountered."

ends

Note to Editors: Membership of Labour's National Lottery Inquiry:

Jack Cunningham - Shadow Heritage Secretary
Lord Donoghue - Lords Heritage spokesperson
Lewis Moonie MP - Labour heritage spokesperson
Mark Fisher MP - Labour heritage spokesperson
Tom Pendry MP - Labour heritage spokesperson

George Howarth - Labour home affairs spokesperson
Don Touhig MP - Labour spokesperson on Wales
Alun Michael MP - labour home affairs spokesperson
Stuart Etherington Chief Executive National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Colin Thwaithe - Chief executive - Littlewoods Pools
David Putnam - Enigma Productions
Helena Kennedy QC
Stella Robinson - Northern Arts
Ian McNichol - Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Judith Anthony - Association of District Councils
Robin Wendt - Association of County Councils
Elsa Davies - National Playing Fields Association
Emlyn Jones - 100 Club (helping to secure funding for athletes)
Rev John Kennedy - Methodist Church
Joanne Broderick - Bingo Association
Bergis Daver - for Bookmakers Committee (Chairman, Ladbroke Europe)

For Immediate Release. Number: 105/96. 20 March 1996

GOVERNMENT FORCES THROUGH NURSERY VOUCHERS

In crucial Commons votes last night, the Government forced through the controversial nursery vouchers scheme in the face of fierce opposition from Labour and the other opposition parties.

After the vote, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “This nursery voucher scheme is a typical con trick from the Conservatives. If there is no nursery place there is no choice. There is no guarantee of a place.”

“Indeed, a Pre-school Learning Alliance survey in Autumn 1994 identified 200 sites throughout England with little or no playgroup or nursery places - mainly in out of town housing developments, isolated rural areas, or inner city areas. What is this scheme going to do for those places. And what about West Craven, in my constituency, which could do with very many more nursery places.”

“The scheme excludes three year olds of whom only 46% had a place at January 1995. This compares with 93% of four year olds with a place at that date. There is money for bureaucracy but not for new places.”

Note to Editors:

"I have asked Gillian Shephard to work up proposals to provide places for all four year olds whose parents wish them to take it up ... What I am doing today is giving you a cast-iron commitment that it will happen." John Major, Tory Party conference, 1994

"No cast-iron guarantee of a place, at least in the first instance, until new places are introduced in response to parental demand. But the presence of vouchers will bring new places into being." DfEE information pack - 2.11.95

• 3 of the 4 councils participating in the pilot phase have expressed concern at their inability to offer any guarantee of a place in return for a voucher.

• No funding has been made available for investment in staff training or capital start-up costs necessary to underpin any expansion in provision.

NURSERY VOUCHERS

• In the pilot phase £5 million will be spent on administration: representing £290 for every four year old in the pilot areas. Projected nationally - with 645,000 four year olds - the figure would become £187 million: more than the £185 million of "new money" pledged to the scheme. The Government claims that it will spend £20 million on administration and inspection when the scheme is implemented nationally.

• 9,675,000 slips of paper will be winging their way around the country once the scheme is implemented nationally (645,000 four year olds receiving 5 part-vouchers per term for 3 terms). The Audit Commission has warned of the potential for fraud and the development of a black market in nursery vouchers.

• The proposed funding mechanism will undermine current provision for three year olds. £548 million will be clawed back from local authority spending on under-fives (in England). DfEE exemplifications show that LEAs in England will have on average 54.8% of their under-fives's SSA clawed back.

• An analysis by the House of Commons library shows that the claw-back will put 133,220 places presently provided for three year olds at risk. 17 local authorities risk losing more than 3000 fulltime places.

For Immediate Release. Number: 106/96. Wed 20 March 1996

MINISTER HITS BACK AT CRITICISM OF NEW EYESIGHT TESTS

Transport Minister, Steve Norris, has hit back at criticism of the new eye tests which some lorry and bus drivers say will drive them off the road. The Minister has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that the overwhelming majority of drivers will cruise through the test which involves reading - with both eyes and without spectacles - the top letter on an optician's wall chart from a distance of 10 feet.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has received letters from worried drivers took the matter up with Ministers. The MP said: "I was very concerned indeed that people could be forced to give up their job and their livelihood because of these new regulations. I am still at a loss to know why it is necessary to test uncorrected vision. Surely the important thing is to test eyesight with spectacles or contact lenses - that is, after the eyesight defects have been corrected."

"The Minister was unable to tell me how many accidents had occurred as a result of a driver having his or her glasses knocked off while driving. The chances of that happening must be pretty remote."

"The Minister tells me that drivers who fail the test will not have to give up their licences until they next expire. What kind of concession is that? If the new test is being introduced for safety reasons then any kind of delay is an absurdity."

ends

Note to Editors: The MP received the following letter from Steve Norris, the Minister for Local Transport and Roads on 8 March 1996: "You may have seen a great deal of misinformed and exaggerated comment in the press recently about the effects of the changes being introduced by the the second EC Driving Licence Directive. Many drivers have been caused unnecessary alarm. more follows

NEW EYESIGHT TESTS

The reality is:-

“The new standards are in almost all respects the same as we have applied for years;

“There is nothing new about requiring drivers of these vehicles to meet an acuity test (ie without glasses): we have been doing so since 1983. The only change is that the test will now have to be met in both eyes rather than one; .

“It is not the case that all drivers who wear glasses, or anything like all of them, will be at risk of losing their licences; the standard to be met is not a demanding one. It means being able to read the top letter on an optician's wall chart from a distance of 10 feet; nearly all drivers will be able to meet it with ease;

“I estimate that no more than about 3,000 drivers will lose their entitlements. This represents 0.2 % or one fifth of one percent of licence holders. Drivers who are affected will not have to give up their licences until they next expire;

“Loss of entitlement does not necessarily mean that drivers will become unemployed and of course there is no effect on the number of driving jobs available~;

“We are not implementing the directive more rigorously than other member states.

“Even though the number of drivers affected will be a small proportion of the total, I do not underestimate the importance of this change to individuals who are affected. I have every sympathy with any who will have to change jobs, or even lose employment, as a result. But our judgment is that in the interests of road safety it is no longer acceptable for people with substandard eyesight to be in charge of these large and potentially dangerous vehicles.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 107/96. Wed 20 March 1996

MP CALLS FOR VIDEO BAN ON NATURAL BORN KILLERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for the film “Natural Born Killers” to be banned from release on video. The MP is supporting a Commons motion condemning the British Board of Film Classification for giving the go-ahead to the release. He says the BBFC could be in breach of its statutory duty.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: “The Criminal Justice Act 1994 places a statutory duty on the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) to have "a special regard to any harm that may be caused to potential viewers, or through their behaviour, to society" by a video which deals with "criminal, violent or horrific behaviour."”

“Yet, astonishingly, the BBFC have just passed this grossly violent film uncut for home viewing. This film, directed by Oliver Stone from a script by Quentin Tarentino was described by one BBFC member in the Press as "truly revolting". It has been described as a "splatter movie" in which "two psychotic youngsters get their kicks" by strangling, shooting and slitting the throats of 52 strangers and are rewarded by massive media interest. The film has been linked by the police to ten murders in America and France, including the decapitation of a 13 year old girl by a 14 year old boy, who said he wanted to be "famous, like the Natural Born Killers."”

Note to Editors: The Commons Early Day Motion reads: “That this House reaffirms its commitment, stated in the Criminal Justice Act 1994, to the protection of children and other vulnerable viewers from gratuitously violent videos; notes the statutory duty placed on the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) to have a special regard when approving films for video release to any harm that may be caused to such viewers by videos dealing with criminal, violent or horrific behaviour; is appalled that the BBFC have ignored the wishes of Parliament by classifying the grossly violent film Natural Born Killers for video release without cuts; and calls on the BBFC to reconsider its decision, on Warner Brothers to stop the release of the video and on the Government to investigate if the BBFC are in breach of their statutory responsibilities.”
Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249 (24 hour pager)

For Immediate Release. Number: 108/96. Thurs 21 March 1996

MP SAYS REASSURANCES ON MAD COW DISEASE WERE WORTHLESS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says reassurances he received three months ago from Agriculture Minister, Douglas Hogg have turned out to be worthless. In a Commons exchange in the Commons on 14 December 1995, the Pendle MP pressed the Minister to reverse cuts at the Institute of Animal Health at Edinburgh where research takes place into BSE and CJD. The Minister denied there were cuts. He said he had

complete confidence British beef was safe and that BSE in cattle could not be transmitted to human beings.

The Pendle MP said: “After yesterday’s statement in the Commons it is clear we need to err on the side of caution and not accept glib reassurances from Government Ministers that everything is under control. When people eat a beefburger or a sausage they shouldn’t have to think about the possibility of getting CJD - the human equivalent of BSE.”

Note to Editors: The following exchange took place in the Commons on 14 December 1995. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

12. Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of cases of BSE confirmed in the United Kingdom at the latest available date. [4139]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As at last Friday, 155,832 cases of BSE had been confirmed in the United Kingdom. I regularly meet industry representatives to discuss BSE.

Mr. Prentice: Those are disconcerting figures. How can the Government conceivably hope to reassure the public when they are ordering redundancies at the Institute of Animal Health in Edinburgh, where scientists are working at the leading edge on BSE and its human equivalent? They have been told that they have until next Thursday to come up with redundancies in order to meet the Government's target. The Minister has an opportunity now to repudiate that policy and say that it will be reversed. It is appalling.

Mr. Hogg: There are two points wrapped up in that question. The first relates to the statistics. The number of confirmed cases is declining. This time last year

there were about 28,500 confirmed cases; this month there are about 16,500. In other words, we are seeing a decline of about 40 per cent. That is certainly encouraging.

On the substantive point, there are no financial restrictions on research. On the contrary, we have put another £1 million into research for next year. I asked Professor Pattison, the chairman of the independent advisory committee, whether he saw any financial restrictions on research and he said no.

Mr. French: In tackling the problem of BSE, does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that it is one thing to pass regulations on the content of feed stuffs and slaughterhouse procedures but a different thing to ensure 100 per cent. enforcement of those measures? What recent steps has my right hon. and learned Friend taken to increase enforcement?

Mr. Hogg: It is important to stand back on the question of BSE. There are two important points to make: first, we do not believe that BSE in cattle can be transmitted to humans. The scientific evidence is reassuring on that point, although it does not enable us yet to prove that it cannot be transmitted. Against the possibility that we might be wrong, we have in place very rigorous regulations to prevent specified bovine offal—the material capable of carrying the infective agent—from getting into the food chain. I have given clear instructions to the Meat Hygiene Service to ensure 100 per cent. compliance with the regulations. I called in the slaughterhouse operators on 9 November to give them the same message.

Dr. Strang: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that we welcome the tightening of BSE controls announced today? Does he agree that it was unacceptable that the existing controls were not adequately enforced, for which the Government must accept their share of responsibility? Does he agree that we should err on the side of caution when it comes to BSE? Will the Minister announce today that he accepts the recommendation of the Agriculture Select Committee that we should ban the brains, spinal cords and other specified offal of cattle under six months from entering human food?

Mr. Hogg: On matters of scientific evidence, I follow the advice of the independent advisory committee. We have done so throughout, which enables us to say with complete confidence that British beef is safe.

Note 2 to Editors: Numbers

• 156,784 cases of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy have been confirmed on 34,064 UK farms from Nov 1986, when the disease was first identified, to 17 Nov 1995. 30% of all UK herds (13% of beef herds, 51% of dairy herds) have had at least one case of BSE.

• Up to 24 Oct 1995, 22,946 cases of BSE had been confirmed in animals born after the ruminant feed bans, imposed on 18 July 1988 in Britain and 11 January 1989 in N Ireland. MAFF states 'the majority of these had probably been exposed to ruminant protein in feed'

• BSE has already cost UK taxpayers over £200m, the vast bulk in slaughter compensation.

MAD COW DISEASE

Government delay

• The Government took 18 months from discovering BSE to make it notifiable, 20 months to introduce compulsory slaughter and compensation, 21/2 years to announce a ban on cattle offal in human food, and 5 more months to implement it. It was 18 months after introducing compulsory slaughter that full compensation was introduced - under-compensation until Feb 1990 must have deterred farmers from declaring suspect BSE cases.

Calves' brains

• In response to BSE, all specified offals of adult cattle were banned from human food. The 'specified offals' are the brain, spinal cord, spleen, thymus, tonsils and intestines. The ban did not apply to cattle under 6 months.

• In June 1994 the Government banned calves' thymus and small intestines, when it was shown BSE can be transmitted to mice from intestines of calves fed BSE doses. Mechanically recovered meat from the spinal column of all cattle was banned in Nov 1995.

• All other specified calf offals - including brain and spinal cord - are still allowed into human food. In July 1990 the House of Commons Agriculture Select Committee recommended that the Government include calf offals in the ban. The Government refused.

• Labour has called on the Government to ban all specified cattle offal from human food.

School meals

• Concerns over BSE have led to bans on beef or beef products from school meals in several areas. There is no conclusive proof that there is or that there is not a link between BSE and CJD. With this in mind, Labour do not criticise local authorities, school governors or other bodies who choose to apply the precautionary principle in this way.

For Immediate Release. Number: 109/96. Tues 26 March 1996

MP BACKS MARATHON WOMAN

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing Townhouse school teacher Ruth Simpkin who is training hard for this year's London Marathon on Sunday 21st April. Ruth, who teaches class 6, has been in training for months, getting into tip top condition for the gruelling 26 mile race.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I doubt if I could run two miles let alone 26 so I have the greatest admiration for her. Ruth is raising money for each of the school's six classes for trips out during the summer term."

The MP added: "I feel quite out of breath just thinking about it!"

For Immediate Release. Number: 110/96. Tues 26 March 1996

ONE DAY SALESMAN IS BROUGHT TO BOOK

The one day salesman, Stephen William Beach, who ran two of the controversial sales in Pendle last year is to face the court in a prosecution brought by Birmingham City Council.

The MP said: "I raised the issue of the one day sales in the Commons on 7 February and the City Council is now in touch with me for information on this man's activities in Pendle. I have passed my file over to Birmingham's Trading Standards people."

The MP added: "People like Beach deserve everything they get. They knowingly rip people off and then disappear like a puff of blue smoke. I give full marks to Birmingham Council for putting him in the dock."

Note to Editors: In October last year the MP tabled this Early Day Motion:
"This House utterly condemns the misrepresentation and underhand practices that characterise the "one day sales" put on by William Beach of 30 Pitville Court, Albert Road, Cheltenham, in which members of the public are conned into believing the boxes of goods they are buying unseen contain quality merchandise whereas in reality they are getting cheap and shoddy goods; notes that sales were held at the Great Marsden Hotel, Nelson and at the North Valley Community Centre, Colne in which people were led to believe they were buying bankrupt stock; sympathises with Mrs Lana Ellerton who ended up with two

pillows and a clock, and who says people were put under pressure to buy goods they did not really want; regrets that pensioners and others were persuaded to hand over good money for worthless rubbish; further notes that Beach was previously a director of Gloucester Fancy Goods Ltd and J.B. Sales (Gloucester) Ltd, both now dissolved, and is currently a director of Table Top Marketing Ltd and Steve's Cash and Carry; believes that travelling salespeople who do not operate from a permanent retail base should be obliged to give advance notice of one day sales to the relevant Trading Standards Office; calls on the Government to review the law on consumer protection and how it can be more effectively applied; considers that Beach is an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat and urges people who consider themselves to be victims of misrepresentation to seek redress in the small claims court."

For Immediate Release. Number: 111/96. Tues 26 March 1996

DEATH SENTENCE LIFTED

The death sentence imposed on Mr Dhabihu'llah Mahrami by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Court in Yazd has been lifted following the intervention of Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The story hit the headlines of the local press earlier this month (Colne Times 8 March) when Trawden couple David and Laili Cleasby pleaded for the life of the fellow religious follower in Iran to be spared. They contacted the MP for help.

Gordon Prentice said: "It simply doesn't bear thinking about that a person could be put to death because of his or her religious beliefs. I immediately contacted the Foreign Office and I have now heard from the Minister, Jeremy Hanley, that the death sentence has been overruled by the Supreme Court and that legal proceedings are continuing. The Foreign Office assures me they are keeping a very close eye on developments."

"We can all breathe an enormous sigh of relief that this man's life has been spared."

Note to Editors: Mr and Mrs Cleasby are members of the Baha'i community of the UK. Mr Dhabihu'llah Mahrami was brought to trial for the alleged offence of apostasy. He denies the charge that he was a former Muslim who converted to the Baha'i religion.

For Immediate Release. Number: 112/96. Wed 27 March 1996

MP WELCOMES NEW LEGAL RIGHTS FOR CARERS

April 1st is a Red Letter Day for carers, with the implementation of the Carers (Recognition & Services) Act. It has been warmly welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: “The Carers Act is good news for the estimated 10,000 carers in Pendle. Carers are the cornerstone of community care, but they have been taken for granted too long. They deserve legal recognition and practical support. We now need to make sure that the new Carers Act makes a difference.”

Introduced as a Private Member's Bill, by fellow Labour MP, Malcolm Wicks, the new Act aims to help millions of carers in Britain who provide support to elderly relatives and other adults with disabilities. But it also covers parents looking after children with disabilities. And, crucially, it also covers children who find themselves with a major caring responsibility, commonly for a parent who is disabled.

The Carers Act gives carers a right to have their own needs assessed by the social services department; and for those needs to influence the provision of services, such as respite care.

The MP said: "I know carers in Pendle who do remarkable work, often caring virtually around the clock - seven days a week, month in month out - but often without the support that they desperately need. The Act is an important step forward. It is a new start to the campaign for carers’ rights and we need to make sure that it works in practice.”

Notes for Editors: Britain has 6.8 million carers, of whom 1.5 million provide care for more than 20 hours each week. This 1.5 million is a larger workforce than the entire NHS and social services department labour force combined. the value of carers is estimated at some £30 billions per annum.

For Immediate Release. Number: 113/96. Wed 27 March 1996

MP HITS OUT AT “DOWNWARD MOBILITY”

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says “downward mobility” has become a fact of life for thousands of people in Pendle. He says a new study by the Labour Party - drawing on official statistics - shows that only half

the workforce is in full timer secure employment. The rest are in part-time, temporary, insecure work or are unemployed.

Speaking at Westminster as the the Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown, was releasing details of the survey, the Pendle MP said: “Over the last ten years the number of people in full time secure employment has fallen by 2.5 million. 20 years ago 55% of the working age population were in full time secure jobs. Now it is just 36%. The survey results show that a typical redundant worker faces a 20% wage cut to get a new job.”

The MP continued: “The Government’s record is appalling. 10.5 million people have experienced a spell of unemployment since John Major became Prime Minister. In Pendle, in every single month since John Major became Prime Minister unemployment has been higher than the figure he inherited from Margaret Thatcher. Between now and the end of this Parliament a further 2.5 million people are likely to suffer a spell of unemployment.”

“Since the last election there has been no growth in full time permanent jobs. The only jobs growth has been in temporary or part time jobs.”

“Not only is unemployment rife in Britain, but many of those who have jobs are insecure, overshadowed by the threat of redundancy. And in many cases those who have work have had to to move into lower paid jobs with less secure contracts and conditions.”

“When challenged about unemployment the Government talks about creating creating new jobs. But despite this rhetoric among the major European countries, the UK has the worst record on job creation since 1979.

DOWNWARD MOBILITY

“Employment in Japan has grown 18 times faster than in the UK since 1979 and employment in the USA has grown 21 times as fast as in the UK.”

“On the Government's own figures the financial cost of unemployment is over £20 billion a year to the taxpayer and this does not include the human cost of misery and insecurity attached to unemployment which has rocketed under the Conservatives.”

“Recently Ian Lang said job insecurity is "a state of mind" and that "the reality is very different." As our analysis shows the truth is that under

the Tories more people are suffering insecurity and downward mobility."

"And the Deputy Prime Minister proposed to create even greater insecurity at work by threatening the employment rights of employees in small and medium size businesses."

"Under this Government, just as Britain is sliding down the world prosperity league so millions of people are sliding down their personal prosperity league."

For Immediate Release. Number: 114/96. Wed 27 March 1996

MP ADMITS TO CONCERN ABOUT PERFORMANCE OF PENDLE COUNCIL

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to ask Pendle Council for an explanation of its poor performance in a number of key areas in the wake of last week's damning report from the highly respected and independent Audit Commission.

The report gives performance indicators for comparable local authorities in the North of England.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "I am worried about some of these statistics and I am asking the council if it would shed some light on the reasons behind these poor figures. For example, of all the district councils in the north of England Pendle comes bottom when it comes to processing new council tax benefit claims within 14 days. That is not a satisfactory state of affairs. When it comes to collecting council tax, Pendle is second from bottom with only Burnley behind us. Pendle Council is seventh from the bottom out of 63 councils listed when it comes to dealing with householder planning applications within eight weeks. That is a poor show indeed."

The MP added: "To be fair, there are areas where Pendle holds its own such as the time it takes to re-let council homes but in general the Audit Commission's figures give me cause for concern."

For Immediate Release. Number: 115/96. Tues 2 April 1996

MINISTER STAYS TIGHT LIPPED OVER REASONS FOR REFUSING UK CITIZENSHIP TO AL FAYED BROTHERS

Home Office Minister Timothy Kirkhope is refusing to disclose the reasons why the Al Fayed brothers cannot get UK citizenship - after spending over thirty years in this country. He is refusing point blank to tell local MP, Gordon Prentice, why his boss, the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, is blackballing the brothers.

Almost a year ago, the regulars at the Alma Inn, Laneshawbridge, were toasting the news that the Egyptian born owners of Harrods, Mohammed and Ali Fayed, had won a judicial review of the Home Secretary's decision to turn down their applications for British citizenship. Publican, Mr Dennis Howells, hit the headlines last May when the Harrods boss arranged for a delivery of a crate of Harrods beer to the Inn as a thank you for their support.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “The judges turned down the application for a judicial review at the end of February but said the Home Secretary’s decision did not have the appearance of fairness and that the secrecy was unattractive. The judge said the Home Secretary should think again and reconsider.”

“Following the judgement, I asked the Home Secretary if he would - exceptionally in this case - say why he refused UK citizenship to the Al Fayeds. His lips have been super glued together.”

“It is difficult not to conclude the citizenship applications were turned down for political reasons.”

Note to Editors: The FT wrote on 14 May 1995: The Fayed brothers' dispute with the Government began in 1987 when the Department of Trade and Industry mounted an investigation of their takeover of the House of Fraser group. It came to a head last year, when Mr Mohammed Fayed alleged that two Conservative MPs - Mr Tim Smith and Mr Neil Hamilton - had asked Parliamentary questions on his behalf in exchange for cash and hospitality. Mr Smith resigned his post as a parliamentary private secretary; Mr Hamilton denied taking cash for questions but quit his Ministerial job after details emerged of his stay at Mr Fayed's Ritz Hotel in Paris. Last October, Mr Howard rejected claims that he intervened in the citizenship applications made by the two brothers.

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 116/96. Wed 3 April 1996

COUNCILS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO TRADE says MP

Local authorities should be allowed to trade and compete with the private sector according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Over recent years, he says councils have been bound hand and foot, restricting their ability to offer services to other organisations and to the general public.

The Local Authorities (Trading and Competition Powers) Bill which the Pendle MP will present in the Commons on 1 May - May Day - will give councils new powers to trade and compete on equal terms with the private sector.

The MP said: "The law is an absolute mess. Why can't efficient and go-ahead councils offer their services to people who want to buy them - but are not at present allowed by law to do so. Councils can provide maintenance and other services to council house tenants but, curiously, not to those very same people if they choose to buy their homes. Why not?."

"Councils can sell spare computer capacity to others but this seems to be a very special case. Why shouldn't this principle be extended into other areas so long as there are proper safeguards built in to prevent a local authority abusing its position. These safeguards could be quite extensive. Councils could, for example, be allowed to trade only in a specified geographical area but this could vary according to the service being offered."

"I do not want the public sector to be held back by law when it is able to provide excellent, competitively priced, high quality services to people who freely choose to buy them. After all, local authorities provide car parks often in direct competition to NCP and other private sector operators. What is so special about car parks, for goodness sake?"

For Immediate Release. Number: 117/96. Tues 2 April 1996

GOVERNMENT ACTS ON COACH AND MINIBUS SAFETY

School minibuses carrying three or more children will now have to have seat belts fitted to forward facing seats as a result of new rules agreed in the Commons today. The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 1996 make it an offence to

operate a minibus without belts when it is carrying a group of children on an organised trip.

Standing Committee member, Pendle MP Gordon Prentice, commented: "Unfortunately, the regulations do not go far enough and they could have been brought in years ago. Seat belts are not obligatory for backward facing seats and there is nothing to ensure the seat belts are actually worn by the children. There should have been a clear duty placed on the school to ensure, so far as it possibly can, that all children are belted up."

The MP added: "The regulations should have specified diagonal or three point seat belts wherever they can be used as they are safer than lap belts which can cause abdominal injuries."

"I have been pressing for action for years - as has my spirited constituent Roy Colton to whom I paid a warm tribute today in the Commons."

Note to Editors: The MP has been campaigning for years for compulsory seat belts in all school minibuses. On 20 October 1993 the then Roads Minister, Robert Key, told the MP "many thousands of children travel to school each day in coaches, buses and minibuses which remain the safest form of road transport in this country." Shortly afterwards, a motorway accident claimed the lives of 12 children from Hagley RC High School. In May 1994 a crash on the A59 in North Yorkshire, just beyond the MP's constituency boundary, resulted in the tragic deaths of an adult and of two cub scouts from the Crosshills pack.

For Immediate Release. Number: 118/96. Tues 2 April 1996

MP UNVEILS "LEARN AS YOU EARN"

A Labour Government will back the skills revolution with hard cash says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster earlier today the MP said learning should go hand in hand with earning.

He said: "The failure to encourage and develop skills has been the hallmark of this Government which always seeks to find an excuse for not doing something than for reasons to do it. Skills have been neglected and that is why we have now slipped to 18th out of the top 25 countries in the world prosperity league. The 1995 World Competitiveness report puts Britain at 40th out of 48 countries for

motivation to retrain and 35th for adequacy of the education system. Seven million people in Britain today have no qualifications at all. We are far behind competitor countries."

The MP continued: "Millions of working people feel insecure because they have experienced or fear unemployment. What would give more people control over their lives? What would give more people a head start? We are proposing one way forward: Learn as You Earn. Improving skills and knowledge is the best way of ensuring that, even if you lose your job, you will find a new job quickly."

"Learn as You Earn will help people meet their aspirations. Everybody will have the opportunity to open a Learn as You Earn account to pay for the training they need for their own development. People will be free to choose whether or not to open a Learn as You Earn account. The account will pay for training and learning to benefit the individual. Tax relief for individuals would be available. Good employers recognise that it is important for employees to be able to develop their own skills and abilities. Labour will ensure fair tax treatment for voluntary contributions from employers, so that they are not penalised for spending on in-house training."

"Our proposal is built on the experience of successful private companies like Ford, which has established an employee development programme. Half of Ford employees have taken advantage of the scheme."

"Through the stepping stones programme, Government will take responsibility for helping a broad range of targeted groups of people, such as the low paid and part time workers, to get started by making a payment of £150 into their Learn as You Earn account."

"Learn as you earn will work in conjunction with Investors in People to help small enterprises train and develop employees to improve their competitive edge and the new University for Industry will help enterprises to deliver training and learning in a new way."

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 119/96. Tues 2 April 1996

THERE WERE CUTS IN MAD COW RESEARCH says MP

The number of scientists working on BSE at the Institute of Animal Health in Edinburgh dropped dramatically last year to 26 - down from a high of 41 in 1993. The shock figures were set out in a Parliamentary Answer to the Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who quizzed Agriculture Minister, Douglas Hogg, last December about alleged cuts at the research centre.

The MP said: “The Minister told me there were no cuts in BSE research. That has been flatly contradicted by the DTI Minister Ian Taylor who tells me there was a dramatic reduction in scientists. The numbers employed this year have now increased to 33 from 26 but I asked these probing questions almost four months ago before the BSE crisis gripped the nation.”

“This research centre works at the very leading edge of work on BSE and CJD. The Agriculture Minister told me there were no cuts in research yet the number of scientists employed on this ground breaking work had dropped alarmingly. Douglas Hogg sought to reassure me that there was nothing to worry about. Now we know.”

Note to Editors: The following exchange took place in the Commons on 14 December 1995. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

12. Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of cases of BSE confirmed in the United Kingdom at the latest available date. [4139]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As at last Friday, 155,832 cases of BSE had been confirmed in the United Kingdom. I regularly meet industry representatives to discuss BSE.

Mr. Prentice: Those are disconcerting figures. How can the Government conceivably hope to reassure the public when they are ordering redundancies at the Institute of Animal Health in Edinburgh, where scientists are working at the leading edge on BSE and its human equivalent? They have been told that they have until next Thursday to come up with redundancies in order to meet the Government's target. The Minister has an opportunity now to repudiate that policy and say that it will be reversed. It is appalling.

MAD COW DISEASE

Mr. Hogg: There are two points wrapped up in that question. The first relates to the statistics. The number of confirmed cases is declining. This time last year there were about 28,500 confirmed cases; this

month there are about 16,500. In other words, we are seeing a decline of about 40 per cent. That is certainly encouraging.

On the substantive point, there are no financial restrictions on research. On the contrary, we have put another £1 million into research for next year. I asked Professor Pattison, the chairman of the independent advisory committee, whether he saw any financial restrictions on research and he said no.

Note 2 to Editors: Parliamentary Answer to Gordon Prentice MP from DTI Minister Ian Taylor, dated 27 March.

Gordon Prentice to ask the President of the Board of Trade how many scientists and researchers were employed at the Institute of Animal Health in Edinburgh in each year since 1990 up to the current date.

Ian Taylor: The number of people in terms of full time equivalents employed at the Neuropathogenesis Unit in the science grades for the respective years since 1990 is:

Year	Number
1990	25
1991	30
1992	40
1993	41
1994	36.5
1995	26
1996	33

For Immediate Release. Number: 120/96. Wed 3 April 1996

MP CALLS FOR INQUIRY INTO CASTLE CEMENT DELAY

Clitheroe based Castle Cement is appealing against the Pollution Inspectorate's decision to force the company to eradicate the problem of plume grounding by the end of the year. Smoke from the works' chimneys on the outskirts of the town regularly touches the ground, enveloping homes and schools with foul smelling fumes. The news of the appeal has dismayed the MP for next door Pendle, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP - whose constituency lies alongside Ribble Valley and is separated by Pendle Hill - has taken a close interest in the issue as chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee. He raised the controversial issue of the burning of cemfuel at Clitheroe in a

special Commons adjournment debate on 20 March having invited the area's Conservative MP, Nigel Evans, to participate.

The MP said: "Castle Cement is supposed to come up with the answer to the plume grounding problem by the end of this month and have a solution in place by the end of December. Now, apparently, Castle Cement say it can't be done and they need more time. I do not want momentum to be lost and I don't want any foot dragging."

"I am in touch with Ministers about this. So far as I am concerned, deadlines are deadlines and have to be met. I am now more than ever convinced an inquiry is needed to look into the whole affair in detail."

-ends-

Note to Editors: HMIP is now (from 1 April) a constituent part of the new Environment Agency.

For Immediate Release. Number: 121/96. Wed 3 April 1996

ACTION ON BSE "TOO LITTLE TOO LATE" says PENDLE MP

The Government's attempts to restore confidence in British beef have been hamstrung by lax inspection of slaughterhouses in the past according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. In his latest angry clash with Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg in the Commons earlier today, the MP claimed the Minister himself had told the House on 22 November last year that unannounced visits by the State Veterinary Service to 193 slaughterhouses in September 1995 had found failings in the handing of specified bovine offals - which can carry the BSE agent - in 48%. The MP said: "Bolstering public confidence in the light of these facts is a herculean task."

The MP continued: "I told the Minister his assistance to slaughterhouses was totally inadequate and did not measure up to the scale of the problem. He offered relief from Meat Hygiene Inspection charges at a time when a big abbatoir in my constituency - Woodhead Brothers - has laid off 70 people and has put 200 on short time working. They want immediate compensation for loss of earnings, loss of stock value, increased waste product removal costs and redundancy costs. They should get it."

"The complete restoration of public confidence will, in my own view, require the slaughter of BSE infected animals and their progeny.

Farmers must receive full 100% compensation to keep these animals out of the food chain. Herds that are completely free of BSE should be certified as such."

The MP added: "We also need as a matter of urgency a completely separate Ministry for Food - at arms length from producer interests. British farming and agriculture will not survive this body blow unless the Government acts decisively and in the public interest."

Note to Editors: The inadequate handling of specified bovine offals is set out in Parliamentary Answers of 22 November 1995 (col 192) (Douglas Hogg) and 18 January 1996 (col 682) (Angela Browning).

For Immediate Release. Number: 122/96. Wed 10 April 1996

MP CALLS ON GOVERNMENT FOR EMERGENCY PACKAGE TO HELP BELEAGUERED ABBATOIRS

The Government should step in with an emergency package to help beleaguered farmers and slaughterhouses cope with the BSE crisis says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says businesses are in danger of collapsing without additional support from the Government.

The MP, whose Pendle constituency is home to Woodhead Brothers, the largest slaughterhouse in the North West, said: "Last Thursday I visited Woodheads to speak to Jack Woodhead and the company secretary Trevor Cornthwaite and the picture they painted was dire. The cold store is packed to the rafters with meat they cannot shift because of the BSE ban and the company is losing hundreds of thousands of pounds of business every week it is in force. We have already seen 70 layoffs and some 200 people working short time."

"There are two distinct issues involved. First, is the Government doing all that is needed to eradicate the scourge of BSE and restore public confidence in beef? Secondly, is it doing all that it should to compensate farmers and abbatoirs for the collapse of trade in meat and meat products?"

The MP continued: "All the way along the line the Government has been culpable. They have always taken action - but too little and too late. The history of BSE is punctuated by appalling lapses when the Government should have acted but chose not to. Now, the future of the whole industry is hanging by a thread."

“Woodhead Brothers tell me there are no fewer than eight Meat Hygiene inspectors permanently based at the abbatoir in Colne together with a full time vet. Clearly, at Colne they follow the highest possible standards of meat hygiene. Yet I am told there are still non European Approved slaughterhouses still operating where they have received derogations from the regulations that apply to places such as Woodheads. I am in touch with Ministers to find out how many of these slaughterhouses there are; why they received derogations and when these derogations are due to lapse.”

ends

Note to Editors: Government delay

• The Government took 18 months from discovering BSE to make it notifiable, 20 months to introduce compulsory slaughter and compensation, two and a half years to announce a ban on cattle offal in human food, and 5 more months to implement it. It was 18 months after introducing compulsory slaughter that full compensation was introduced - under-compensation until Feb 1990 must have deterred farmers from declaring suspect BSE cases.

Calves' brains

• In response to BSE, all specified offals of adult cattle were banned from human food. The 'specified offals' are the brain, spinal cord, spleen, thymus, tonsils and intestines. The ban did not apply to cattle under 6 months.

• In June 1994 the Government banned calves' thymus and small intestines, when it was shown BSE can be transmitted to mice from intestines of calves fed BSE doses. Mechanically recovered meat from the spinal column of all cattle was banned in Nov 1995.

For Immediate Release. Number: 123/96. Wed 10 April 1996

COUNCIL TAX FIDDLE - IT’S OFFICIAL

“Official figures published by the Audit Commission confirm that the local government grant system is a racket” says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Pendle MP said: “The independent Audit Commission’s Indicators of Performance, which were published recently, show that Council Tax

payers in Conservative run Westminster Council meet just 4% of Westminster Council's total spending. The Government picks up the tab for 96% of the council's costs."

"But they don't do that for people here in Pendle. Council Tax payers in Pendle have to meet 29% of the costs of local government here. The Government - through grants and so on - meets 71%."

"What a racket. The whole system is rigged in favour of Conservative run Westminster in the heart of the capital to the disadvantage of the rest of us."

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 124/96. Wed 10 April 1996

MP CONDEMNS COMPLACENCY ON CRIME

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today attacked the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, for "massive complacency" over new crime statistics. The figures show a small decrease of 2% over the last 12 months although worryingly there was an increase in the last quarter. There was a 14% increase in robbery recorded over the same period.

The Pendle MP said: "The Home Secretary should recognise that recorded crime is double the level in 1979 when the Conservatives took office. The headline figures of recorded crime disguise a number of important facts:

- recorded crime in Lancashire rose by 119% between 1979 and 1995
- recorded crime in Lancashire dropped by just 2% last year - at which rate it would take 41 years to get back down to the level in 1979
- police numbers in Lancashire have hardly changed since 1992 although the new Chief Constable has pledged to get numbers up
- Home Office figures show that crimes experienced by people are now less likely to be reported and recorded by the police than a few years ago.

"The number of violent incidents recorded by the Lancashire police increased by 55% between 1979 and 1995 and yet the Government's main response has been to cut the compensation available for victim - by £700m over the next five years. The Government's professed concern for victims is a hollow sham."

“The levels of crime are unacceptable. Instead of trying to cut crime the Government is trying to cut costs for the Treasury. Sensible measures - to tackle the availability of weapons on our streets for example - were blocked because of dogma. Michael Howard promises tougher sentences and more people in prison but he has cut the cash for the prison service again this year. His figures simply don’t add up.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 125/96. Friday 12 April 1996

SHADOW ENVIRONMENT MINISTER VISITS PENDLE

The Shadow Environment Secretary, Frank Dobson, will be in Pendle today as part of Labour’s local election campaign. The local council is controlled by the Liberals whose decision to sell off the council’s stake in the local bus company to Stagecoach provoked fury locally.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “After the magnificent result in Tamworth earlier this morning, a new Labour Government is very much on the cards and Frank will have a big part to play in its policies towards local government. That is why I was so keen to have him here in North East Lancashire so he can see for himself the problems and opportunities of the area.”

“We will be visiting the successful aerospace company Euravia - which is, of course, run by Dennis Mendoros, the chairman of Pendle Partnership. We shall also be meeting the people in Colne this afternoon. Tim Ormrod, who is defending his Waterside seat, will be with us.”

Note to Editors: At 12.30 pm Photo call at Euravia Engineering - Kelbrook - Colne with Dennis Mendoros. 2.00pm Photo call at Colne Market Cross.

For Immediate Release. Number: 126/96. Monday 15 April 1996

BARROWFORDERS STUNNED AT BANK CLOSURE THREAT

News of the closure next month of Barrowford’s only Bank - the Nat West at the corner of Pasture Lane and Gisburn Road - has stunned local traders. They fear the disappearance of the Bank will send the wrong signals about the viability of the village as a local shopping centre.

According to the Nat West Group’s 1995 accounts, the Group made a pre-tax profit of £1.75 billion in the year and £1.59 billion in 1994. Nat

West UK, which includes the retail banking network made a pre-tax profit in 1995 of £671 million after allowing for a provision of £343 million against bad or doubtful debts. There were 2,223 branches in the UK retail network in December 1995, down from 2,416 at the end of the previous year.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Barrowford is a thriving and friendly community which can surely sustain one Bank. I am in touch with Nat West to find out why they are taking this drastic step. I am totally opposed to this closure."

"High Street banks seem to be following in the footsteps of electricity and gas showrooms - all over the place they are disappearing in a puff of blue smoke while the banks themselves are making vast profits. There was a 17% increase in Nat West's dividends in 1995."

"Last year it was the TSB that said "NO!" to Colne. Now it's the Nat West saying "Goodbye!" to Barrowford."

Note to Editors: The Bank is to close in mid May. An article in the Guardian on 21 February 1996 quotes banking union leaders predicting job losses at the Nat West Bank of around 4,000 in the coming year.

For Immediate Release. Number: 126/96. Tuesday 16 April 1996

MP WARNS TRADERS OF BOGUS INVOICES

A firm of office stationery suppliers is sending bogus invoices to local companies for goods they did not order says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "A phoney invoice from National Paper Supplies of Ilford, Essex was recently sent to the Pendle Labour Party - admittedly, at its old address. The company wanted £293.63 for copy paper that hadn't been ordered and the alarm bell started ringing. At the bottom of the "invoice" in small print it states 'This pre-payment invoice represents an invitation to purchase the above described goods; it is a request, not a demand for payment'."

The MP continued: "This description of the true purpose of the invoice in small print at the bottom of the page cuts no ice with me. The whole look and feel of the thing is purposely designed to deceive. I want local businesses to be on their guard and to look out for these bogus bills."

“I have sent the “invoice” to the trading standards people at Preston. It relies on misrepresentation to part people from their money.”

ends

Note to Editors: A copy of the “invoice” is enclosed.

For Immediate Release. Number: 127/96. Monday 15 April 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT WOODFIELD NURSERY SCHOOL - 1.30PM ON FRIDAY, 19 APRIL

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting Woodfield Nursery School, Sefton Street, Brierfield this Friday at 1.30pm. He will be meeting head teacher, Sue Boardman, her staff, parents and children and will be discussing with the adults the implications of the Government’s new nursery voucher scheme.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency earlier this week, the MP said: “I want to see universal, high quality, nursery education for all three and four year olds whose parents want it - but this is not what the Government is offering.”

“The new nursery voucher scheme is a complete waste of time for people living in areas where there is no nursery provision to begin with - or in areas where provision is patchy.”

“Nursery education is not a statutory service and does not, by law, have to be provided. It is up to local authorities - with all the pressures they face to deliver on primary and secondary education - to decide what they can afford to offer to three and four year olds. They get no extra help from the Government.”

The MP added: “Any additional money earmarked for nursery education should go to the local education authority - ring-fenced if necessary - and not to this ridiculous voucher scheme.”

“Why is it the youngest always lose out under the Tories?”

For Immediate Release. Number: 128/96. Wed 17 April 1996

LESSONS MUST BE LEARNT FROM AIKMAN PAY-OFF
says PENDLE MP

The NHS should never again allow senior managers to leave their jobs and walk away with a small fortune, says Pendle MP Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster after receiving further details from Burnley Health Care Trust on the circumstances surrounding the departure of former Chief Executive Maggie Aikman who left in October 1994 amid a blaze of publicity.

The MP called for another look at the case in February this year when it emerged that Ms Aikman had landed another £48,000 job within the NHS as Director of Finance at the Gwent Health Authority 16 months after her resignation from Burnley.

The Pendle MP said: "Burnley Health Care Trust now has a new policy of not recruiting senior people on fixed term contracts which can give rise to these telephone number pay-offs. This policy should be standard across the NHS. If someone is useless at the job, they can be dismissed for incompetence. No-one should be able to walk out of a job after making a mess of it and laugh all the way to the bank."

"I have been in touch with the new Chairman of the Trust, Brian Foster, and it is now clear that Ms Aikman agreed to resign under certain conditions which were, I am told, "arrived at using the Trust's legal advisers and with the knowledge and approval of the Trust Board". Mr Foster has confirmed that if Ms Aikman had resigned voluntarily she would not have been entitled to any payments but if asked to resign she would be entitled to payment for the balance of her contract period. That is, in effect, what happened."

The MP continued: "I have drawn all this to the attention of Ministers and

LESSONS MUST BE LEARNT FROM AIKMAN PAY-OFF

we need a new code of guidance to prevent a repeat - not in Burnley where, as I say, new systems are in place - but elsewhere in the NHS where we have seen other colossal pay-offs to people who have reemerged in another NHS job after a short interval."

"The precise details of the pay-off to Ms Aikman are set out in the Trust's Annual Report and Accounts for 1994/5 which have been approved by the Auditors. These show that the basic salary was £68,000 with an additional £4,000 in benefits. The compensation for loss of office amounted to £245,000. In addition there was a "performance related bonus" of £8,000 and pension contributions of £3,000 making a total of £328,000."

The MP concluded: “It is time to put a line under the whole affair. I hope that lessons have been learnt for the future.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 129/96. Wed 17 April 1996

PENDLE JOBLESS DIPS SLIGHTLY

Unemployment in Pendle dipped slightly last month to 2,189 (6%) down from 2,241 in February. There were 1,665 men out of work (7.8%) and 524 (3.4%) women. At Nelson Job centre there were 173 vacancies and at Colne 91. Nationally, new jobs notified to the Job centres fell by 700.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice said: “The much heralded drop in unemployment last autumn was unfortunately a false dawn and the figures are back over the 2,000 mark. But it is not just the number of jobs but the nature of the work on offer. The skilled jobs are being replaced by the unskilled; the full time with the part-time. It is a depressing prospect.”

Labour today published its own report showing that 1.4 million people are being forced to work in part-time or temporary jobs because there are so few full-time jobs. “What people need and want is the opportunity of full time and rewarding jobs” said the Pendle MP.

Nationally, unemployment fell to a near five-year low today after a higher than expected 25,700 fall in the number of people out of work. The new jobless total dropped to 2,186,600. The seasonally adjusted figure represents 7.8% of the workforce, down by 0.1% on the previous month.

Note to Editors: The March figure of 2,186,600 is the lowest total since April 1991. In the North West there were 240,200 people out of work and claiming benefit - down 2,200 from the month before. This is 8.4% of the workforce.

For Immediate Release. Number: 130/96.Thursday 18 April 1996

RAILTRACK’S INVESTMENT PROGRAMME “IGNORES THE NORTH WEST” SAYS PENDLE MP

The investment plans of Railtrack - soon to be privatised by the Government - neglect the North West according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says Railtrack has no plans to do any work on schemes where it believes there is insufficient financial return to justify the

investment. The MP says no attempt is being made to look beyond the balance sheet to the wider benefits of spending on the rail infrastructure in terms of reduced traffic congestion and so on. “They have also ignored the whole idea of cross subsidy where the profitable lines, quite rightly, subsidise the unprofitable.”

Speaking at Westminster after yesterday's debate on the privatisation of Railtrack the MP said: “Rail privatisation is the biggest con trick yet. Even the draft version of the prospectus for the privatisation of Railtrack was criticised by the chairman of the British Railways Board for "misleading" would-be investors. The letter from John Welsby warns that the document contained “information on performance regimes and their financial impacts (which) may mislead”.”

“I have now asked the Transport Secretary if the final version of the flotation prospectus which was published on Monday was changed to meet Mr Welsby’s concerns. The British Railways chief also complained that information about poor performance of the Train Operating Companies, which are being sold off separately, was also relevant to the privatisation of Railtrack and should also be included in the prospectus.”

The Pendle MP added: “We can only speculate on how much more bad news about Railtrack is being kept from potential investors.”

Note to Editors: The full share prospectus is being published on 1 May.

For Immediate Release. Number: 131/96. Thurs 18 April 1996

LABOUR PLEDGE TO SCRAP NURSERY VOUCHER SCHEME

An incoming Labour Government would scrap the controversial nursery voucher scheme according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP echoed the statement made earlier today by the shadow education secretary David Blunkett who said Labour would use the £185 million new money already allocated in the Government's scheme - including £20 million for administration - to fund new nursery provision.

The Pendle MP said: “The nursery voucher scheme is totally fraudulent. The vouchers come in the wake of a cut-back of 18% over the last four years in teacher training for primary and early years.”

“I want to know how many parents issued with vouchers in the four first phase local education authorities (LEAs) will not be able to find the nursery places to redeem them.”

Note to Editors: The Government's voucher scheme gets under way this week in four local authority areas - Norfolk and the London boroughs of Wandsworth, Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea. The Government intends to expand the scheme to the whole country next year. Most of the money to fund the voucher scheme next year - £565 million - is being clawed back from funds LEAs already spend on pre-school education.

PHOTOCALL: The Pendle MP will be visiting Woodfield Nursery School, Sefton Street, Brierfield tomorrow at 1.30pm.

For Immediate Release. Number: 132/96. Wed 24 April 1996

CHARITY RAFFLE TICKETS ARE A CON says PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging Ministers to have another look at “charity” raffle tickets where 80% of the ticket price goes on administration and only 20% goes to the charity. The MP says people buying raffle tickets to send handicapped children to Lourdes are livid that so much of their money is being creamed off in administration charges.

The 80:20 split is mentioned at the bottom of the ticket in small print. The ticket also has a few very simple questions to allow it to escape the law on lotteries. It is in fact a prize competition.

The MP said: “Raffle tickets are being sold in Pendle in aid of the The Halton Handicapped Children to Lourdes Charity. I have spoken to the Charity Commissioners and to the chairman of the charity who tells me they send about 12 children a year to Lourdes. They have been going about six years and have sent about 80 children. That is good news indeed.”

“The charity relies on a commercial organisation - Capital Campaigns, PO Box 42, Nelson - to sell the tickets and do the administration. The problem is that the people who buy the tickets do not immediately realise that 80% of what they hand over is going on administration. This information should be displayed very prominently on the ticket.”

The MP added: “The charity is happy because it gets money for no outlay. Capital Campaigns is happy because they are selling tickets and earning money on the strength of the charity’s objectives but the

person who buys the ticket is being duped. This is clearly unsatisfactory and I am calling on Ministers to review the current law on these raffle tickets."

For Immediate Release. Number: 133/96. Wed 24 April 1996

PRINCESS DIANA SHOULD STAY "WELL CLEAR" OF OPERATING THEATRES says PENDLE MP

The Princess of Wales should give hospital operating theatres a wide berth says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims her presence at six open heart surgery operations is bizarre.

The MP commented: "I have asked the Secretary of State for Health what rules and regulations govern the admission of non medically qualified people into operating theatres when operations are under way. I also want to know what steps were taken in the Princess Diana case to secure the permission of the patients for the presence of this voyeuristic royal stranger."

"There are also press reports that the Princess watched a mastectomy operation. What on earth can she hope to get from watching such an operation? I think the Princess is the real casualty. It is rather sad."

For Immediate Release. Number: 134/96. Wed 24 April 1996

PENSIONERS GET A RAW DEAL SAYS PENDLE MP

Pendle's pensioners are getting a raw deal according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the number of pensioners who rely on the state retirement pension for most of their income is likely to be higher in the North West than in the UK as a whole.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "There are millions of pensioners in poverty, struggling to get by on a pittance. According to the Family Expenditure Survey (1994/5) almost half (48%) of all pensioners get more than three quarters of their income from state benefits. The retirement pension is simply far too low."

"The Government says the number of pensioners who receive occupational pensions is growing and that these occupational pensions now account for 25% of pensioners gross income. But what about those who do not have a good occupational pension?"

The MP added: “It is an absolute disgrace that contributory pensions as a percentage of average earnings are lower here in the UK than in every other country of the European Union with the sole exception of Ireland.”

“Surely we can do better than that.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 135/96. Wed 24 April 1996

MP CALLS FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY ON CEMENT CONTROVERSY

The appeal by Castle Cement against the December deadline to stop plume grounding of smoke from the company’s Clitheroe plant should be scrutinised in a public inquiry according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The deadline had been imposed in January by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Pollution (now part of the Environment Agency) but Castle Cement now say they cannot meet it.

The MP commented: “Castle Cement has appealed to the Secretary of State for the Environment saying they can’t meet the deadline. They also want to relax the limit on sulphur emissions and want to relax the condition that the electrostatic precipitators should be operational all the time. The company also wants more flexibility in the composition of cemfuel. These are all issues that should be examined in public, in the full glare of publicity and not dealt with quietly in the Environment Secretary’s penthouse office in his Marsham Street HQ.”

Note to Editors: Tabled by Gordon Prentice MP and Peter Pike MP: “This House notes that Castle Cement has lodged an appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment seeking to avoid the 31 December deadline imposed by HMIP for solving the problem of plume grounding at its plant in Clitheroe in which smoke from the kilns regularly envelopes the town’s schools, playgrounds and homes with foul smelling fumes; further notes that the company seeks a relaxation in the limit on sulphur emissions and on the condition that the electrostatic precipitators should be operational at all times; further notes that the company resists the imposition of a maximum calorific value for the secondary liquid fuel, cemfuel, which is burnt in the kilns and believes the decision of the Secretary of State on these matters would be better informed following a public inquiry into the issues raised by the appeal.”

Note 2: The Pendle MP raised the cemfuel issue in an adjournment debate in the Commons on 20 March 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 136/96. Wed 24 April 1996

FAST JETS BUZZ BARLICK AGAIN

Fast jets are back in the news. According to local MP, Gordon Prentice, a fast jet flew over Barnoldswick on Thursday 18 April at about 10.15 in the morning. In a special adjournment debate on low flying on 28 April last year, the MP called for a ban on such flights over built up areas.

The MP's concern had been prompted by complaints from local people about a flight of eight Tornados flying at roof top height over Barnoldswick and Earby in January 95 on their way back to base at RAF Bruggen in Germany.

The MP said: "The planes are unfortunately back again. I am told the warplane last week was travelling at about 300 knots and at about 250 feet. The concerns I had last year when I raised the matter in the Commons are just as real today as they were then. There can be no possible justification for overflying towns the size of Barnoldswick."

"Tragically, over recent months we have seen the loss of a large number of RAF fast jets and I am making separate representations to the Ministry of Defence about the adequacy of the maintenance programme. I am worried about the amount of RAF maintenance work that has been privatised and where cost seems to be the only factor taken into account."

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 137/96. Thursday 25 April 1996

MINISTER REFUSES TO SAY WHY CITIZENSHIP REFUSED

Home Office Minister Timothy Kirkhope today refused to disclose the reasons why the Al Fayed brothers cannot get UK citizenship - after spending over thirty years in this country. He told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, he was not obliged by law to give reasons.

In an angry exchange in the Commons today, local MP, Gordon Prentice, told the Minister the Fayed brothers had been blackballed in an act of political revenge. The MP - who has been pursuing the issue doggedly on behalf of his constituent, the Laneshawbridge publican, Dennis Howells -said: "Why has the Minister not listened to the views of Judge Igor Judge who said in February that the Home Secretary's

decision “did not have the appearance of fairness” and that the “secrecy was unattractive”. The judge said the Home Secretary should think again and reconsider.”

The MP told the Minister: “Isn’t it the case that the Fayeds have been refused UK citizenship because they blew the whistle on Government Ministers who accepted lavish hospitality at the Paris Ritz allegedly in return for tabling Parliamentary questions. The decision has been made for crude political reasons and for none other.”

Note to Editors: The Fayed brothers' dispute with the Government began in 1987 when the Department of Trade and Industry mounted an investigation of their takeover of the House of Fraser group. It came to a head in 1994, when Mr Mohammed Fayed alleged that two Conservative MPs - Mr Tim Smith and Mr Neil Hamilton - had asked Parliamentary questions on his behalf in exchange for cash and hospitality. Mr Smith resigned his post as a parliamentary private secretary; Mr Hamilton denied taking cash for questions but quit his Ministerial job after details emerged of his stay at Mr Fayed's Ritz Hotel in Paris. In October 1994, Mr Howard rejected claims that he intervened in the citizenship applications made by the two brothers.

For Immediate Release. Number: 138/96. Thurs 25 April 1996

LABOUR GOES ALL OUT FOR GAINS IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says Labour is poised to do well in this year’s local elections in Pendle. He says the defining issue for many voters is the way in which the ruling Liberal group sold off the buses, ignoring the wishes of 13,000 local people. The MP said: “The recent Marsden by election was good for us. The Liberals told people it was in the bag and they were well placed to win. Pure moonshine!”

“Nationwide, Labour has more councillors (10,478) and controls more councils (198) than ever before. There are 5,596 more Labour councillors than Conservative councillors (4,882). As recently as five years ago, the Conservatives had more councillors than Labour.

“Labour has 5,536 more councillors than the Liberal Democrats. This is more than twice the number of Liberal Democrat councillors (4,942). In fact, Labour has more councillors than the Conservatives and the Liberals combined. Labour controls more than three times as many councils as the Conservatives and Liberals combined.”

“In the May 1995 local elections Labour made 1,807 gains. The Conservatives suffered 2,018 losses. It was a record Labour

performance on top of an already record position. Gains on the scale of 1995 cannot be repeated this year. That's because last year over 12,000 council seats were up for election. This year only 3,018 are up for election - a quarter of last year's total. This year, 36 metropolitan boroughs, 100 shire districts and 1 unitary authority are having elections by thirds and thirteen new unitary authorities are having all out elections."

"The Conservatives cannot possibly lose another 2,000 seats this year. That's because they've only got 1,218 seats to lose."

For Immediate Release. Number: 139/96. Friday 26 April 1996

DISORDER RISES 10% IN LANCASHIRE IN ONE YEAR

Disorder incidents reported to the police increased by 10% from 93,595 in 1993/4 to 102,918 in 1994/5 in the Lancashire force area, according to new figures released today by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The figures come from official sources and are included in a Labour Party report Tackling disorder, insecurity and crime.

The MP said: "Many of my constituents' lives are ruined not just by specific incidents of recorded crime but by disorder - anti-social behaviour by neighbours, racial harassment, vandalism, incivility - which rarely show up in the official crime statistics."

"The figures I am releasing today show what pressure the police are under these days. And they give the lie to complacent claims from government ministers that minor reductions in the recorded crime figures mean that people now feel safer. They do not."

"Labour has effective policies to tackle the underlying causes of disorder - policies on homelessness, youth unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, truancy and the mentally ill. We also have radical plans to tackle disorder itself including tough new community safety orders for dealing with anti-social neighbours."

"As we all know, it is disorder of all kinds - anti-social neighbour harassment, racial abuse, "juvenile nuisance", vandalism etc - as much as specific recorded crime which has undermined the quality of people's lives."

For Immediate Release. Number: 140/96. Friday 25 April 1996

MINISTER GOES INTO REVERSE ON NEW EYESIGHT TESTS

The Government last night postponed the introduction of controversial new eyesight tests for lorry and bus drivers which could put an estimated 3,000 drivers off the road. The transport unions put the figure at 7,000.

Transport Secretary, Sir George Young, said they would be brought in on January 1 - six months after the planned implementation date. He said the changes arising from a new European Union directive were "very complex" and required "clarification or negotiation" with the EU Commission.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “I raised this issue on behalf of a number of constituents only last month with the Transport Minister, Steve Norris, and he gave no hint that the tests would be postponed. On the contrary, he told me the overwhelming majority of drivers would cruise through the test which involves reading - with both eyes and without spectacles - the top letter on an optician’s wall chart from a distance of 10 feet.”

The MP said: “I am concerned that people could be forced to give up their job and their livelihood because of these new regulations. I am relieved there is to be a breathing space which can be used to look at the issue again. Even now, I am still at a loss to know why it is necessary to test uncorrected vision. The important thing is to test eyesight with spectacles or contact lenses - that is, after the eyesight defects have been corrected.”

Note to Editors: The MP received the following letter from Steve Norris, the Minister for Local Transport and Roads on 8 March 1996: “You may have seen a great deal of misinformed and exaggerated comment in the press recently about the effects of the changes being introduced by the the second EC Driving Licence Directive. Many drivers have been caused unnecessary alarm. The reality is:-

“The new standards are in almost all respects the same as we have applied for years;
more follows

New Eyesight Tests

“There is nothing new about requiring drivers of these vehicles to meet an acuity test (ie without glasses): we have been doing so since 1983. The only change is that the test will now have to be met in both eyes rather than one; .

“It is not the case that all drivers who wear glasses, or anything like all of them, will be at risk of losing their licences; the standard to be met is not a demanding one. It means being able to read the top letter on an optician's wall chart from a distance of 10 feet; nearly all drivers will be able to meet it with ease;

“I estimate that no more than about 3,000 drivers will lose their entitlements. This represents 0.2 % or one fifth of one percent of licence holders. Drivers who are affected will not have to give up their licences until they next expire;

“Loss of entitlement does not necessarily mean that drivers will become unemployed and of course there is no effect on the number of driving jobs available~;

“We are not implementing the directive more rigorously than other member states.

“Even though the number of drivers affected will be a small proportion of the total, I do not underestimate the importance of this change to individuals who are affected. I have every sympathy with any who will have to change jobs, or even lose employment, as a result. But our judgment is that in the interests of road safety it is no longer acceptable for people with substandard eyesight to be in charge of these large and potentially dangerous vehicles.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 141/96. Wednesday 1 May 1996

£1.2 BILLION DEBTS WRITTEN OFF BY GOVERNMENT AS RAILTRACK PROSPECTUS IS UNVEILED

Loans of £1,229,418,952 which were made by the Government to British Rail and transferred to Railtrack in 1994 are to be written off by the Government as a sweetener to smooth the privatisation of the company. The full extent of the loans is set out in a schedule to the 12 line Statutory Instrument: The Railways Act 1993 (Extinguishment of Relevant Loans)(Railtrack plc) Order 1996.

The prospectus for Railtrack, the company which owns 10,000 miles of track, 2,500 stations and signalling systems, is published today and it marks the last big privatisation of this Government. Railtrack is to be sold off in one go and not in tranches as with previous big sell-offs such as BT and BP.

People who want to buy Railtrack shares have been promised an early dividend paid from profits made when Railtrack was still in public ownership.

In a Commons motion appearing in the Order Paper today, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, claimed that £25 billion of loans to public sector companies and organisations had been written off by the Government since 1979 to pave the way for their privatisation. The MP told the Commons last week in the third reading debate on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill that what was happening to the railways was "grand larceny".

He said: "The Government might as well just give the railway away. This unpalatable policy is being sweetened with all sorts of special inducements to encourage the investor. Railtrack is likely to be valued at around £1.8 billion - well short of the £2.5 billion originally sought by the Government. It is a fraction of the original £6.5 billion valuation."

more follows
RAILTRACK WRITE OFF

"The Government is likely to get £1.8 billion for 10,000 miles of track nationwide. Ministers will then give £1.4 billion cash to Richard Branson's London and Continental company to built 68 miles of railway fast link from the Channel to London."

"I told Transport Ministers last Thursday that anyone else doing this would be behind bars - not sitting on the Government front bench. It is the legalised theft of assets that were paid for and are owned by the British people. This Government is getting away with blue murder."

For Immediate Release. Number: 142/96. Wednesday 1 May 1996

MP QUERIES DELAY IN BRINGING SLAUGHTERHOUSES UP TO SCRATCH TO MEET NEW HYGIENE INSPECTION RULES

At the end of 1995 there were 160 licensed red meat slaughterhouses that were operating under "temporary derogations" having been unable to satisfy European single market rules on abbatoirs which should have been implemented by 1 January 1993.

The figures which were unearthed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, are for slaughterhouses which, according to the UK Government, satisfy the "necessary hygiene regulations" but do not meet the structural requirements of European Directives.

At the end of 1993, 320 licensed slaughterhouses had a temporary derogation. This fell to 276 by the end of 1994 and 160 last year.

The Pendle MP said: “Clearly people are still worried that BSE infected material may still get into the human food chain. We must make sure all our slaughterhouses have the EC seal of approval as soon as humanly possible. And we must come down like a ton of bricks on slaughterhouses that are ignoring the regulations on the proper handling of the specified bovine offals which can carry the BSE agent.”

“The Agriculture Minister tells me that there is currently one case before the courts for non-compliance with the regulations on specified bovine offals and a number of other cases are under investigation.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 143/96. Mon 29 April 1996

MP CALLS FOR A HALT TO DEMOLITION OF OLD BRIDGE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice has called for a “stay of demolition” for the old railway bridge at Foulridge Wharf which Railtrack is poised to tear down.

Already one part of the historic structure has gaping holes in it but the soon to be privatised Railtrack has put a stop to further demolition work until after next weekend’s 200th anniversary celebrations of the Foulridge Tunnel on the Leeds to Liverpool canal. Railtrack say the bridge is unsafe and that it needs £50,000 spent on it. They say this cannot be justified as it is on the projected route of the proposed Colne Foulridge bypass and would be in line for demolition anyway.

Last week local MP Gordon Prentice asked the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, if the old bridge - which used to carry the railway from Colne to Skipton - had been considered for listing. He is now in touch with Railtrack and with English Heritage.

The MP said: “I was down at Foulridge Wharf at the weekend and it is obvious that a lot of people feel strongly about the demolition. No-one was asked their views. They are just being presented with a fait accomplis. This is simply not good enough.”

“People tell me this is one of a very small number of surviving examples of this particular type of bridge which dates, I think, from 1848. Before anyone even thinks about knocking it down we should be told a lot more about it.”

“The bridge is also used by ramblers and they, too, are putting their foot down.”
ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 144/96. Monday 29 April 1996

NAT WEST BRUSHES ASIDE BANK CLOSURE PROTESTS

An avalanche of protests about the imminent closure of Barrowford’s only High Street bank has fallen on deaf ears says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The village bank is set to close on 17 May amid angry threats from many long standing customers to move their accounts elsewhere.

The MP wrote to the bank’s Chief Executive after being buttonholed by Gisburn Road newsagent, Ken Thompson, who raised a 500 name petition against the closure in five days.

The MP said: “The bank has clearly made up its mind to close the branch and the threats by customers to move their accounts have not been taken seriously. I received a very polite letter but the bank is not prepared to budge an inch.”

“I am meeting people from the bank’s North West region next month and the policy on branch closures is at the top of my agenda.”

ends

Note to editors: According to the Nat West Group’s 1995 accounts, the Group made a pre-tax profit of £1.75 billion in the year and £1.59 billion in 1994. Nat West UK, which includes the retail banking network made a pre-tax profit in 1995 of £671 million after allowing for a provision of £343 million against bad or doubtful debts. There were 2,223 branches in the UK retail network in December 1995, down from 2,416 at the end of the previous year.

For Immediate Release. Number: 145/96. Wednesday 1 May 1996

PENDLE MP’s BILL ON COUNCIL TRADING CLEARS FIRST HURDLE

The Local Authorities (Trading and Competition Powers) Bill cleared its first hurdle in the Commons this afternoon when it went through without a division. The 10 minute rule Bill proposed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will allow councils to offer goods and services on the open market and compete against the private sector - subject to safeguards to protect organisations and individuals against unfair advantage.

The MP said a Bill such as his was long overdue. “It is needed to clarify beyond doubt the powers that local authorities have to supply services or goods to other organisations. In this vitally important area the law is opaque.”

“Councils tell me they have to negotiate a legal minefield before they can respond positively to requests from local companies or local people who wish to buy their services. Sometimes it is possible. More often than not it is unlawful and the council has to turn down the chance of earning money which could only benefit council tax payers.”

“Railtrack, whose prospectus is published today, is a case in point. It wanted to contract with councils to cut grass, remove litter on railway land but this was outside the powers of local authorities and the proposal was spiked.”

The MP told the Commons: “My Bill will allow councils to supply goods or services which are connected with their own functions. It would not allow councils to set up a car company, for example, in competition with Nissan.”

“At the moment, in a restricted range of services, councils can engage in head to head competition with the private sector. The council car park may be just round the corner from the NCP one. They are competing for the same trade. But this is the exception rather than the rule. Councils can manufacture and supply window frames to the homes of council tenants. But if the tenant exercises the right to buy his or her home and still wishes the council, for a price, to fit new windows, it cannot. It is unlawful.”

The MP added “There are any number of examples. Most councils employ arboculturalists to deal with trees overhanging highways or growing in public parks. They often offer advice to private individuals on the preservation of trees and sometimes on the design of new developments and where the trees could best fit in. But on the strict application of the law, they are unable to respond to the many requests they receive from local people who want their services.”

“There are other examples. Motor Vehicle servicing. Most councils have significant fleets of vehicles that need looking after. Why not allow this service to be offered more widely? Or the maintenance of private gardens and sports pitches. Councils are well placed to do this work. What about the resurfacing of, say, private car parks or private drives when highway works are being carried out on adjoining sites. What about plants grown in parks department nurseries where the marginal

costs of growing additional plants are negligible when compared with the income that would arise."

"These are all areas where people can freely choose to buy services or not. But of course we do need safeguards. No-one wants to see florists, or glaziers or local garages put out of business by the local authority. And the safeguards are in my Bill. Councils want the famous "level playing field". No more no less. They do not want any unfair advantages."

"The law is haphazard and uncertain and legislation is needed to bring clarity. Councils up and down the land are hungry for new work and new opportunities. They have demonstrated that they can deliver top quality services that people value. My Bill will give powers to councils to do just that."

Note to Editors: The Bill, introduced by Gordon Prentice MP, is sponsored by Peter Pike MP, Joan Whalley MP, Tommy McAvoy MP, Neil Gerrard MP, Roy Beggs MP (Ulster Unionist), David Rendel MP (Liberal Democrat), Eric Illsley MP, Jim Wallace MP (Liberal Democrat), Helen Jackson MP and Calum MacDonald MP.

For Immediate Release. Number: 146/96. Tuesday 30 April 1996

MP's FURY OVER EXPLOSION IN GAS COMPLAINTS

Complaints about the service provided by the North West region of British Gas skyrocketed between 1994 and 1995 according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The region's Gas Consumer Council says complaints overall rose by a staggering 97%.

The Pendle MP clashed in the Commons this afternoon with the Prime Minister, furious that the company's Chief Executive was being given a golden handshake when standards of service to north west customers were nose diving.

The MP asked the Prime Minister if he was aware that today was the last day of work for Mr Brown who was retiring on a pension of £250,000 plus a continuing consultancy with British Gas worth £144,000 a year. Prentice quizzed the PM: "With all these complaints, is Cedric Brown worth this largess?"

The MP said afterwards: "The Prime Minister is inhabiting another planet. Instead of expressing concern about the level of complaints and the size of Brown's pay-off he came out with all this rubbish about things getting better under a privatised gas industry. Doesn't he realise

that British Gas was privatised years ago. Where has he been? Did no one tell him about Sid?”

Note to Editors: The North West Gas Consumer Council writes: During 199 the Gas Consumers Council (GCC) North West office handled 5,266 gas related complaints, in addition to 10,691 general enquiries. Compared to 1994 the level of complaints increased by 97% and enquiries by 38%. In terms of complaints handled, 1995 was the busiest year this office has experienced since the privatisation of British Gas in 1986.

BRITISH GAS The main reason behind the increase in complaint levels was the reduced standard of customer service offered by the business units of British Gas to their customers who, for whatever reason, had cause to complain.

Of the 5,266 complaints handled, 5,206 involved one of the four British Gas
business units (British Gas Supply, Service, Retail and Transco). Of these complaints, 3,983 consumers turned to this office after not receiving a satisfactory answer from British Gas. The increase in this category of complaint was 102% on the 1994 figure of 1,970, though the complaints originated from fewer than one in six hundred British Gas customers in the North West.

In part, this increase is due to greater public awareness of the GCC. However, the continued reorganisation of British Gas during 1995 placed a strain on the company's operations, systems and personnel. Combined with the adverse media publicity that British Gas attracted during 1995, the reason why so many more gas consumers turned to this office for assistance is clear.

An underlying theme in complaints involving British Gas was that customers were unaware or confused about the structural changes to the company, and consequently were very frustrated by the difficulties that they encountered.

British Gas Supply: We handled 2,316 complaints - an increase of 141% on the 1994 figure - where consumers were dissatisfied with actions taken by British Gas involving their gas accounts.

General billing disputes increased dramatically, and as more cu.stomers in the North West elected to settle their gas accounts by monthly payments, complaints relating to payment schemes increased proportionately.

British Gas Retail: The latter part of 1995 was a difficult period for British Gas Retail. Following the ~closure of selected Showrooms and the refurbishment of the remaining Showrooms into 'Energy Centres', British Gas Retail launched a major sales campaign. However, there was widespread failure to meet appliance delivery dates and resolve subsequent customer complaints. There was an increase of 47% in the level of British Gas Retail complaints handled in 1995.

British Gas Service: As in other areas of British Gas, British Gas Service went through a major reorganisation in the North West and complaints increased by 70% during 1995. This was largely due to: the closure of a number of Service Centres; the withdrawal of labour from some traditional areas such as gas cooker repairs; and adverse publicity regarding its popular ServiceCare contract scheme.

British Gas Transco: During 1995 British Gas Transco assumed responsibility for the gas escape emergency service as well as gas meter repair and exchange work. Towards the end of 1995 we noticed a sharp increase in meter work complaints, and at the end of the year a total of 182 such disputes had been recorded, an increase of 237% on the 1994 figure of 54.

Of more concern, though involving only relatively small numbers of consumers, were increasing complaints about the ineffectiveness of the 24 hour emergency service. We will continue to monitor the situation throughout 1996.

Contact the GAS CONSUMERS COUNCIL NORTH WEST. Boulton House, Chorlton St, Manchester Ml 3HY, Tel: 0161 236 1926 for queries concerning the above.

For Immediate Release. Number: 147/96. Thursday 2 May 1996

TIME FOR DI TO HANG UP HER SURGICAL MASK says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says it's time for Princess Diana to hang up her surgical gloves and mask and leave the operating theatres to the doctors and nurses. In the wake of last week's revelations that the bejewelled and made up Princess had witnessed six open heart surgery operations and a mastectomy, the Pendle MP quizzed Health Minister John Horam on who was entitled to sit in on operations.

The Minister told the MP today: "Entry to an operating theatre of non-medically qualified people is permitted if those people are necessary to the safe and effective running of the theatre, the theatre equipment, or are necessary to the delivery of patient care. If a patient has consented to a treatment, such as an operation, this will include the involvement

of all staff, medically qualified or not, who are required to ensure that the operation is performed safely and effectively. The admission of observers not connected with treatment should only be permitted if the professional involved in the patient's care believes that it will not be detrimental to the patient and any patient concerned has not objected."

The Pendle MP responded: "There should be no place for royal voyeurs in operating theatres. And how on earth are these arrangements made in the first place?"

"If I were knocked down by a bus and carted off to hospital I wouldn't want to wake up in an operating theatre to find Princess Di gazing down at me. That really would finish me off."

For Immediate Release. Number: 148/96. 7am Friday 3 May 1996.

BIG SWING TO LABOUR IN PENDLE AS TORY VOTE COLLAPSES BUT LIBERALS KEEP CONTROL OF COUNCIL

Pendle voters gave a big boost to Labour in yesterday's elections but the Liberals keep control of the council. The Conservative vote collapsed all over the Borough.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Labour's share of the vote rose dramatically but we failed to take some seats because of the total disintegration of the Tory vote. Looking at the seats that changed hands, the Conservatives lost their strongholds at Barrowford and Earby to the Liberals despite strong challenges from Labour. In Barrowford Labour's percentage share of the vote compared with 1992 (when the seat was last fought) rose spectacularly from 18% to 33% (from 403 votes to 607). The Liberal vote declined from 38% to 34% (849 to 629) and the Tory vote went down from 44% to 32% (970 to 592)."

"In Earby, the Conservative vote went down from 42% to 30% (840 to 571); the Liberal share of the vote rose from 31% to 35% (612 to 677) - enough to give them the seat. Yet Labour turned in a substantial increase - greater than the Liberals - from 27% to just under 35%. Labour's Chris Todd increased his vote from 533 in 1992 to 663 yesterday - only 14 short of the Liberal."

"Labour took Liberal Horsfield with a massively increased vote - up from 517 (36%) in 1992 to 778 (55%). The Tory vote collapsed from 310 (22%) to 113 (8%) and the Liberal vote slumped from 592 (42%) to 529 (37%). We have an excellent new councillor in Sarah Hill."

“Elsewhere, Labour did superbly well. In Waterside, Labour’s Tim Ormrod saw his vote shoot up from 747 (47%) in 1992 when he first won the seat to 920 (67%) while the Liberal vote slumped by 60% from 719 to 285. A superb result for Labour. In Colne’s Vivary Bridge, Labour’s candidate Dorothy Ormrod came within striking distance of taking the seat when she saw her share of the vote increase from 36% to 45% (from 623 to 662) while the Liberal’s fell from 50% to 46% (from 857 to 678).”

“Labour did well in areas which are not automatically regarded as Labour territory. Our share of the vote rose significantly in Boulsworth, for example. In Reedley, the Conservative and Liberal share both declined.”

“In Craven, the Conservative vote fell from 325 to 211 and the Liberals from 870 to 774. Labour’s Bert Lewis took 447 this time increasing Labour’s share of the vote from 28% to 31% but the seat stayed Liberal. Over in Coates, Labour’s Jim Skinner increased the Party’s vote from 599 (33%) to 604 (35%) on a slightly lower turnout than 1992 when the elections were held just after the General Election. The Conservative vote shrank from 461 ((25%) to 260 (15%) with the Liberals the beneficiary. Their vote went up from 752 (41%) to 854 (49%).”

“Elsewhere we more than held our own in Southfield, Brierfield, Marsden, Clover Hill, Bradley and Walverden. The contest in Whitefield - which was embroiled in controversy over proxy votes - was a case apart with special factors applying there.”

“So, how do I sum it all up in Pendle? We saw the collapse of the Conservative vote to the benefit of the Liberals in some, but not all, areas. The Conservatives are now an endangered species.”

“Labour’s share of the vote increased dramatically in some Liberal wards such as Vivary Bridge in Colne and next time we shall translate that new support into seats.”

“According to the BBC, the nationwide local election results when translated into Parliamentary seats would return a Labour Government with 398 MPs, 148 Conservative MPs and 86 Liberal Democrats.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 149/96. Tues 7 May 1996

LABOUR VOTE SOARS IN PENDLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Analysis of the voting in last Thursday's local elections shows Labour the clear winner in terms of votes cast - even though the Liberal Democrat controlled Council did not change hands.

Labour received 11,883 votes in the election - well clear of the Liberal Democrats on 9,584. The Conservatives trailed with 5,206. Labour's share of the vote was 44.5% - up from 36.8% in 1992 when the seats were last contested. The Liberals share of the vote increased marginally from 33.2% in 1992 to 35.9% last Thursday. The Conservative share of the vote slumped from 29.8% four years ago to 19.5% last week.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Seats can be won or lost on a handful of votes but it is the change in the share of the vote that shows how public opinion is moving. Labour's vote increased by 7.6%; the Liberal Democrats by 2.6% and the Conservative vote collapsed by 10.3%."

"The Liberals undoubtedly suffered as a result of their decision to sell the buses to Stagecoach. People did not buy the Liberal line that Stagecoach is the best thing since sliced bread. Experience says otherwise. The Conservatives are simply burnt out. No-one believes a single word they say any more. A General Election can't come soon enough."

Note to Editors:

	Labour	Liberal	Conservative
1992	9,582	8,480	7,330
1996	11,279	9,125	4,973

(excluding Pendleside 92 and Brierfield 96 casual vacancies held on the same day)

	Labour	Liberal	Conservative
1992	9,607	8,658	7,773
1996	11,883	9,584	5,206

(including Pendleside 92 and Brierfield 96 casual vacancies held on the same day)

For Immediate Release. Number: 150/96. Wed 8 May 1996

MP ROUNDS ON LILLEY AS BENEFIT CHANGES BITE

Changes to the Reduced Earnings Allowance which will take £30 a week from people receiving benefits as a result of an industrial injury have been implemented even before Parliament debates the proposed changes, says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The changes are to be

debated in Standing Committee today - weeks after their implementation.

The MP says he has had a steady stream of people contact him to complain about the benefit cut which hit people totally without warning. “People were asked by the Benefits Agency to return their payment books and a few days later they received the new one showing the new lower rate. What a way to treat people!”

Reduced Earnings Allowance may be paid to people who receive industrial injuries benefit and who, as a result of their injury, are incapable of following their regular occupation. The amount payable compensates for loss of earnings up to £39.60p per week. It was abolished for accidents and diseases occurring after 1 October 1990 but is still payable for accidents and diseases before that date.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “It is entirely typical of this Government to sneak this change through by Statutory Instrument even before the proposal has been debated by the House. This is not a minor measure. It will affect 20,000 people and will “save” the Treasury £30m.

The Social Security Secretary, Peter Lilley, blamed “technical deficiencies” in earlier legislation which allowed some people to continue getting REA after they had retired.

Note to Editors: The Social Security Secretary explained his actions in a letter to MPs dated 7 May 1996. He said: “Since REA compensates for lost earnings, it is not appropriate to continue paying it when people retire. Nonetheless, people with lower earnings may end up with lower pensions. So people on REA can receive

MP ROUNDS ON LILLEY AS BENEFIT CHANGES BITE

Retirement Allowance instead when they retire. Retirement Allowance is payable
at 25 per cent of the REA rate, up to £9.90 a week. These changes were agreed by Parliament in 1988.

“Unfortunately, technical deficiencies in the 1988 legislation meant that some people continued to receive REA after they had retired, instead of transferring, as intended, to Retirement Allowance. So I announced last Autumn that we would be legislating to correct this. But since 24 March this year, most REA recipients over pension age who have given up regular employment are being paid Retirement Allowance instead. The only people who remain entitled to REA beyond

retirement age are those who continue in regular employment on reduced earnings.

“I have also brought the payment of arrears of REA into line with other benefits by limiting the payment of arrears of REA to sums due within the preceding 12 months.

“Pensioners currently receiving REA incorrectly will have their benefit reduced when they are transferred to Retirement Allowance. But we will not be seeking to claim back past payments of REA which were in excess of what Parliament intended. In addition, help from Income Support and Housing Benefit will be available for anyone whose circumstances make them eligible for income-related assistance. Their local Benefits Agency office will be able to advise them.”

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 151/96. Wed 8 May 1996

AUDITOR’S DAMNING REPORT ON WESTMINSTER COUNCIL TO BE PUBLISHED TOMORROW

Revelations two and a half years ago - in January 1994 - that Westminster Council had been operating a housing policy specifically designed to change the political balance in "target wards" in favour of the Conservatives sparked an investigation by the District Auditor whose report is scheduled for publication tomorrow (Thursday 9 May).

Details of the scheme - set out in the preliminary report of the independent auditor who had been called in over six years ago by concerned residents - showed the council leader, Dame Shirley Porter conspiring with other leading Conservatives in the Government's flagship local authority to alter the social composition of key wards, vital to future Conservative control. The plan involved keeping council houses and flats empty, despite soaring homelessness, until they could be sold on the open market. The homeless were put into Bed and Breakfast accommodation which cost the council millions. Dame Shirley and the others - including former Westminster councillor and now Tory MP, Barry Legg - could be required to pay back to the council over £20 million, the cost of the scam.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “I recall in January 1994 listening to the Environment Secretary in the Commons cautioning us against rushing to judgment. Tomorrow the facts will be out in the open and John Gummer better have something to say about this Conservative flagship council.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 152/96. Wed 8 May 1996

MP SLAMS CUTS IN RENOVATION GRANTS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, last night slammed moves by the Government to end mandatory grants which are used to improve unfit houses. The Government plans to give local authorities full discretion to decide where any financial help is to be targeted. But there will be no extra cash.

Speaking in the second reading debate on the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill, the Pendle MP said the Bill was fraudulent. "It is not additional flexibility that is needed but more resources."

The MP claimed North East Lancashire has the oldest housing stock in the North West and, perhaps, the country.

"In my own constituency of Pendle, 20,000 houses - or 57% - were built before 1919 and 18,000 were built before the turn of the century. 65% are in the lowest Council Tax Band A. 15,000 houses are assessed to be in need of renovation and 2,150 additional homes fail to meet current fitness standards. To bring everything up to scratch would cost £14m. But the Government hasn't come up with a single extra penny. Yet they are expecting councils to work wonders with all this extra "flexibility" they have been given!"

The MP said afterwards: "It is another fraudulent Bill from a fraudulent Government."

Note to Editors: Hansard speech follows.

For Immediate Release. Number: 153/96. Wed 8 May 1996

PENDLE MP BACKS END TO BAN ON GAYS IN MILITARY

Discrimination against gays and lesbians in the military should be ended by law says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims the present ban cannot be justified either on ethical grounds or for operational reasons.

Speaking at Westminster in advance of tomorrow's debate on the Armed Forces Bill, the Pendle MP said that the ban on homosexuals could not be justified any more than discrimination against women or

black people. “We don’t allow sexists in the armed forces to decide the recruitment policy on women any more than we allow racists to decide on the acceptability of recruiting black and Asian people.”

“All our sister countries in NATO do not discriminate against gay people and neither should we. Clearly, a code of conduct is required to spell out the type of behaviour which is unacceptable in the armed forces and would be the subject of disciplinary action. This already exists in the Navy, for example, where men and women go to sea together in the same ship. So far as I am concerned it would be for the military to draw up their own code of conduct - based on their own experience and what might be required. They could look at the codes of conduct used in Australia and in New Zealand.”

“We all know that some of our most illustrious military commanders in former times were gay. For all I know, there may well be heroes in the armed forces today who are gay. Their sexual orientation is a matter for them. It should not be a hanging offence to disclose it - if, indeed, they wish to.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 154/96. Wed 8 May 1996

MINISTER CONFIRMS “TARGET BARLICK!”

Defence Minister, Nicholas Soames, confirmed yesterday that an RAF Fast jet was in the Barnoldswick area on 18th April as alleged by the town’s MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Minister told the MP: “A Harrier aircraft from No20 Squadron, RAF Wittering, on a routine training sortie, carried out a simulated level pass attack on a target some three nautical miles north of Barnoldswick on 18th April at about 10.15am.”

Prentice responded: “I am fed up with Barnoldswick being used as target practice. The Minister tells me the jet was three miles away yet people who live in the town - as I do - tell me the jet roared overhead at 300 knots at 250 feet. Who am I expected to believe? Someone sitting behind a desk at the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall or my own constituents who saw the thing with their own eyes.”

“It is a serious issue. We have seen the loss of an unusually large number of fast jets over recent months and I am very concerned about the possibility of a crash over a built up area. These aerial manoeuvres over sizeable towns are simply unnecessary.”

“Unfortunately we have the prospect of more to come. The Government has announced the closure of RAF Bruggen in Germany and is pulling back the squadrons to the UK. Apparently, one of the reasons is the 1,000ft low level limit applying over there compared with the 100ft limit in the low level flying areas in the UK.”

Note to Editors: A year ago, the MP secured a Commons debate on low flying -prompted by complaints from local people about a flight of eight Tornados flying at roof top height over Barnoldswick and Earby in January 95 on their way back to base at RAF Bruggen in Germany.

For Immediate Release. Number: 155/96. Wed 8 May 1996

A BRIDGE TOO FAR FOR HERITAGE MINISTER

Moves by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to secure a “stay of demolition” for an historic railway bridge at Foulridge have been rebuffed by Heritage Minister, Ian Sproat.

The MP asked the Minister if the old bridge - which used to carry the railway from Colne to Skipton - had been considered for listing. The Heritage Minister told the Pendle MP: “My Hon Friend (the Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley) has decided to accept the advice of English Heritage, her statutory advisers on listing matters, that this bridge is not of special architectural or historic interest and she will not therefore be adding it to the statutory list.”

The MP commented: “People were upset about the way the decision was taken by Railtrack as much as by the decision itself. There was no opportunity to comment or to make representations until it was too late.”

“Now that Railtrack is being privatised I am sure old bridges and viaducts that are not currently in use will be demolished at the drop of a hat.”

Note to Editors: The owners of the structure, Railtrack, put a stop to further demolition work until after last weekend’s 200th anniversary celebrations of the Foulridge Tunnel on the Leeds to Liverpool canal. Railtrack said the bridge - which is on the projected route of the proposed Colne Foulridge bypass - was unsafe and needed £50,000 spent on it.

For Immediate Release. Number: 156/96. Wed 8 May 1996

MP ATTACKS INDIAN PM's STATEMENT ON KASHMIR

News that the Prime Minister of India, Mr Narasimha Rao, has pledged that "Jammu and Kashmir will remain a permanent and integral part of India" is a setback to the efforts to find a just and lasting peace in that troubled land says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

According to press reports, the Indian Prime Minister told a crowd of supporters on 5 May - on his first visit to the area since he became Prime Minister on 21 June 1991 - that Kashmir was a part of India.

Earlier today in the Commons, the Pendle MP quizzed Foreign Office Minister Jeremy Hanley on the statement. He asked the Minister: "Isn't it the case that the elections taking place in Kashmir as elsewhere in India will not confer any legitimacy and only a plebiscite in Kashmir on self determination - pledged by the UN on three separate occasions - would do that."

Speaking afterwards, the MP said there was a compelling case for a further fresh initiative at the UN to break the logjam and to get things moving. "There is murder and mayhem in Kashmir. It is the world's forgotten conflict and we must do all we can to help secure a settlement. The statements made by Narasimha Rao are very unhelpful."

For Immediate Release. Number: 157/96. Thurs 9 May 1996

CASTLE CEMENT: MINISTER CONCEDES PUBLIC HEARING

The Environment Secretary, John Gummer, has bowed to public pressure and is to tell Castle Cement that their appeal against conditions imposed by the Pollution Inspectorate on the operation of the plant in Clitheroe is to be held in public.

Last month, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, insisted that the appeal by the company against the December deadline to stop plume grounding of smoke from the cement kilns should be scrutinised in a public inquiry. The deadline had been imposed in January by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution (now part of the Environment Agency) but Castle Cement said they could not meet it.

Yesterday, Environment Minister, James Clappison, told the Pendle MP: "My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State has informed Castle Cement and the Environment Agency that he intends the appeal case to proceed by means of a public hearing. Details of the hearing will, in

due course, be advertised locally and interested parties will be able to submit evidence to the Secretary of State's Inspector."

The MP commented: "This is splendid news and will do much to reassure local people."

Note to Editors: Castle Cement also want to relax the limit on sulphur emissions and want to relax the condition that the electrostatic precipitators should be operational all the time. The company also wants more flexibility in the composition of cemfuel.

Note 2: The Pendle MP raised the cemfuel issue in an adjournment debate in the Commons on 20 March 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 158/96. Monday 13 May 1996

GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO CONDEMN "HOMES FOR VOTES" POLICY IS SHAMEFUL says PENDLE MP

The outright refusal of Government Ministers to condemn the actions of the former leader of Westminster Council, Dame Shirley Porter, and other Conservative councillors has been dubbed shameful by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP said last week's report by Auditor, John Magill, confirmed that Conservative councillors and senior council officers had manipulated council policies and spent £31.66 million of public money trying to gerrymander the 1990 council elections.

Speaking in advance of tomorrow's Commons debate on the scandal (14 May) the MP said the scale of the wrongdoing was unprecedented. "£31.66m could run my own council in Pendle for three years! Pendle's budget for the current year is £10,276,000 which puts the scale of the scandal at Westminster into perspective."

"The Government is also an accomplice by rigging the local government grant system to favour their flagship councils of Westminster and Wandsworth. If Pendle received the same grant as Westminster, a band D council tax payer with a bill of £754 this year would get a rebate of £600. The scale of the fiddling is breathtaking. In 1994/5 Westminster could spend £55.02 per head of the population on refuse collection and disposal compared with Pendle's £10.14. Westminster could spend £36.42 per head on street cleaning; Pendle £5.19."

"In his recent memoirs, the former Tory Party chairman, Kenneth Baker, said Westminster Council was a flagship of efficiency in local

government and was led with verve, spirit and imagination by Shirley Porter. We now know that to be utter tosh."

Note to Editors: In his public interest report published on 9 May, the auditor, John Magill, finds • "as a fact that the council was engaged in gerrymandering";

"HOMES FOR VOTES"

• "that the designated sales policy was unlawful, unauthorised and to the detriment of the interests of local taxpayers"

• "the overwhelming inference to be drawn from the evidence is that the dominant purpose for which the Council acted was that of gerrymandering"

• "in my view, the Council was engaged in gerrymandering, it was acting not merely for an improper purpose but also one which was disgraceful and that this would render unlawful any decision for that purpose."

Note 2 to Editors: Kenneth Baker in his memoirs "The Turbulent Years" wrote in 1993 of the 1990 local elections: "You never win elections by being defensive and apologetic so I launched our campaign on 4 April, a fortnight before Labour. The thrust of our campaign was Conservative Councils Cost You Less... We hammered home this message for four weeks. In London we were able to show that a Community Chargepayer could save £3.00 per week by voting Tory. We focussed especially on the high profile councils of Westminster and Wandsworth, where the Tories were led with verve by Shirley Porter and Paul Beresford. With spirit and imagination both had cut back expenditure but had improved services. They were the flagships of efficiency in local government..."

For Immediate Release. Number: 159/96. Tues 14 May 1996

GOVERNMENT SHOULD "ROLL UP ITS SLEEVES" AND BACK MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY says MP

The Government should "roll up its sleeves" and help boost manufacturing industry says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP's clarion call comes in the wake of visits to local firms hard hit by the recession.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "The Government talks about recovering confidence but I see very little evidence of it. Feelings of job

insecurity are commonplace. The housing market is still very sluggish and that means fewer carpets and curtains being bought and all the other things that people need when they move house. Clearly, this makes life difficult for many of our local firms in Pendle."

"Looking at the picture nationally, manufacturing output growth has slowed from an annual rate of 5% at the end of 1994 to just 0.5% currently. The latest growth rate for the economy is 2% compared to just 0.5% for manufacturing and output for manufacturing output is only 1.2% higher than it was in 1990 before the recession."

"Incredibly, manufacturing investment is still lower than it was in 1979. Companies have built up large stocks of unsold finished goods and until demand picks up and clears these stocks there is unlikely to be any real recovery. The lack of demand from the public undoubtedly reflects the 'feel-bad' factor brought on by record Tory tax increases and falling living standards. To cap it all, demand for UK exports from other countries has fallen with a slowdown in some European countries."

"Over 600,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the last five years and employment has barely risen in the recovery. Even with a 20% devaluation of sterling since 1992, the UK had manufacturing trade deficit of £8.7 billion in 1995.'

"Manufacturing used to account for 30% of the output of the economy in 1979 but this has now fallen to around 20%. And one quarter of UK manufacturing is now controlled by foreign firms."

The MP added: "It is a sobering thought that if manufacturing in the UK had grown at the average rate of the other major developed countries (G7 countries) since 1979 then output would now be some 20% higher. That would mean higher living standards, lower unemployment and further gains from international trade."

"Britain cannot compete in manufacturing with other countries on the basis of low investment, low wages and low skills."

For Immediate Release. Number: 160/96. Wed 15 May 1996

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN TO TWELVE MONTH HIGH

Unemployment in Pendle is up again to 2,281 - the highest monthly figure since April last year when the jobless total stood at 2,360.

Last month, there were 1,732 (8.2%) men out of work and claiming benefit and 549 (3.5%) women. There were 214 vacancies notified to the Nelson Jon Centre and 177 to Colne.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The figures are very disappointing. Job insecurity is the modern plague afflicting everyone and these unemployment figures do not encourage people to feel optimistic about the future. Since John Major became Prime Minister, unemployment in Pendle alone has cost £133,122,000. It is a tragic waste of resources."

ends

Note to Editors: Nationally, unemployment fell by 3,200 last month to a five-year low of 2,183,500. The seasonally adjusted total represents 7.8% of the workforce - 0.5% lower than a year ago. The number of people out of work for longer than a year fell by 9,700 to 806,300 in the quarter to April, but the number of claimants unemployed for more than six months rose by 14,200. Male unemployment fell by 5,500 last month to 1,660,800 while female unemployment increased by 2,300 to 522,700.

For Immediate Release. Number: 161/96. Tues 14 May 1996

MP DEMANDS ACTION ON TIMESHARE "EURO TOUTS"

A Pendle couple has fallen victim in Spain to timeshare touts who prey on visiting holiday makers. Mr and Mrs X (name withheld) had no sooner stepped off the plane than they had been ensnared by the touts. They are now desperate to get out of the £10,000 contract they signed but can't.

In the UK people have the right to a two-week cooling-off period to have a rethink and get out of any deal or contract they committed themselves to. This has applied in the UK since October 1992 - but not throughout Europe where many of the real problems lie.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "With the summer holidays coming up I am clearly concerned that people are fully aware of the dangers. People need to think long and hard about signing any timeshare contract because they may not be able to get out of it."

"I am in touch with ministers about the whole issue. This is a classic example of where a "Euro law" is needed. A Spaniard who buys a timeshare in Britain is protected by law and can pull out later but a

Briton in Spain cannot. These Spanish practices are crying out to be changed."

For Immediate Release. Number: 162/96. Tuesday 14 May 1996

MP SLAMS TORY SILENCE OVER DAMNING AUDIT REPORT ON WESTMINSTER COUNCIL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, slammed Tory MPs this evening for "failing to have the guts" to condemn Dame Shirley Porter and her five colleagues on Westminster City Council for pursuing policies which the auditor described as "unlawful, unauthorised and to the detriment of local taxpayers".

In his final report published last week, the Auditor, John Magill, found "as a fact that the Council was engaged in gerrymandering" and that "it was acting not merely for an improper purpose but also one which was disgraceful..." The auditor also went on to say "Lady Porter knew it was unlawful and wrong for the Council to exercise its powers to secure an electoral advantage for any political party or to gerrymander or, in pursuit of such advantage for her party, she was at least recklessly indifferent as to whether it was right or wrong."

The Pendle MP told the Commons this evening: "The Government and the Conservative Party have invested too much political capital in Westminster, the Tory flagship council, to allow it to sink now. If it goes down, they all go down with the ship. So they say nothing in the face of clear evidence of corruption on a massive scale."

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "The gerrymandering was designed to win the 1990 council election in Westminster. They did win but thanks to the cynical manipulation by the Government of the grant system. Total Government support for Westminster that year was £1,638 per head compared to £856 per head in my own council in Pendle. No wonder Shirley Porter could bring in a poll tax at a record low of £195. Pendle, with all its problems, had to bring in the hated tax at £299."

For Immediate Release. Number: 163/96. Wed 15 May 1996

GOVERNMENT RECORD ON BSE "DOESN'T BEAR SCRUTINY" says PENDLE MP

The Government's handling of the BSE has been lamentable from start to finish according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, whose

constituency has a large rural collar, claims Government indecision, inaction and hesitation have threatened an entire industry.

Speaking in advance of today's Commons debate on the CAP and agricultural issues, the MP welcomed the cattle disposal plans now being implemented but says it comes years too late. Measures taken now must command public confidence.

"161,171 BSE cases have been confirmed in the UK from November 1986, when the disease was identified, to 12 April 1996. Over a third of our herds have had at least one BSE case."

"The Government believes infected ruminant protein causes BSE, and it was banned from cattle feed in July 1988 in Britain and January 1989 in Northern Ireland. Up to 24 April 1996, 26,721 cases of BSE had been confirmed in animals born after the ruminant feed bans. It was 20 months after identifying BSE until farmers had to destroy all suspect BSE cases."

"It was not until June 1989, 21/2 years after identifying BSE, before the Government said that they planned to ban the most infective offal from human food. They took another 5 months to implement that ban in England and Wales - 7 months in Scotland and Northern Ireland."

"Farmers were not fully compensated for slaughtering BSE cattle until February 1990. Under-compensation for the previous 18 months deterred farmers from declaring suspect cases.

"In September 1995, 48% of slaughterhouses visited were found to be in breach of BSE controls designed to keep infective offal from human food. This March, 4% of slaughterhouses and 17% of rendering plants visited were still in breach of the controls. Eight feed mills were recently found in breach of the ruminant protein ban to keep BSE out of animal feed."

"On 20 March the Health Secretary reported to the House of Commons that BSE was thought the most likely explanation for an apparently new type of CJD. The Government was totally unprepared for the consequences of the announcement. On 20 March, Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg said "I do not believe that this information should damage consumer confidence and thus the beef market." Crisis followed."

The MP continued: "The Government has tried to blame the media, Europe and the Labour Party for the BSE crisis. Stephen Dorrell has even said that it is the people that are mad, not the cows."

“I want to see the EU ban on the export of UK beef and beef products lifted. Confidence in beef will only return when all measures necessary to keep the BSE agent out of our food are in place and properly enforced. The opposition has set out proposals to restore confidence in the safety of beef - to keep the agent out of our food, improve the epidemiology of BSE, increase consumer awareness and improve the role of Government.”

“Labour has also called for an investigation into the fact that 67% of BSE cases are now in animals born after the ruminant feed ban. Clearly, it is vital to eliminate the source of BSE.”

“Never again must there be such fear that the interest of public health have been sold short. Labour’s Food Standards Agency, reporting to the Secretaries of State for Food & Agriculture and for Health, will give new priority to food safety.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 164/96. Thurs 16 May 1996

PENDLE MP URGES ROOT AND BRANCH REFORM OF COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The Common Agricultural Policy is a Frankenstein that is out of control says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, who has just been appointed to the Select Committee on Agriculture, claims it costs every family in Britain £20 a week extra in higher food bills.

Speaking at Westminster in advance of the second day’s debate on the CAP and BSE, the MP said spending on the CAP in the UK alone was £2.7 billion last year. “Some countries such as Greece will resist change because there was no support mechanism for farmers there before Greece joined the EU. Now it’s Christmas every day for Greek farmers. Reform is inevitable if and when the European Union is enlarged. If eight million farmers from Eastern and Central Europe become eligible for support, the cost of the CAP would soar by at least an extra £10 billion a year.”

“The CAP is inefficient and it leads to fraud on an heroic scale. In 1994, there were 1,610 cases of fraud reported costing £319 million but this is just the tip of the iceberg. Only £60m (or 22%) was recovered. These figures represent a 24% increase in the number of cases and a 70% increase by value. The UK reported 228 cases of fraud - up from 180 in 1993.”

“Some of the frauds are outrageous. In 1994 Italian companies claiming to be exporting tobacco were in fact shipping containers full of waste paper, plastic and mouldy tobacco waste. They received £2 million in subsidies. Criminal organisations were collecting butter export subsidies - and not exporting butter. Subsidies were paid out to export beef to Egypt, even though the beef had such high levels of bacteria that it was rejected by Egypt. £14 million was spent in subsidies for 'grape must' because it was going to Sweden. It was in fact going to the USA and Canada, where these subsidies do not apply.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 165/96. Friday 17 May 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AND PETER PIKE MP LANCASHIRE WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE CHARTER MARK AWARD.
at 11.15 am on FRIDAY 17 MAY at 19/21 CARR RD, NELSON

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and Burnley MP, Peter Pike, will be joining County Councillor F.J. McKenna, chair of the Welfare Rights and Anti Poverty Sub Committee of Lancashire CC who will present a Charter Mark Certificate to the Local Welfare Rights Team Leader

PHOTOCALL:at 2.30pm on Friday 17 May
Gordon Prentice MP will be officially opening the Nelson Job Club/Nelson and Colne College Shop at the new premises at Scotland Road, Nelson

For Immediate Release. Number: 166/96. Monday 20 May 1996

MP AND ROLLS ROYCE CHIEFS IN STRATEGY TALKS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet Rolls Royce chief, Sir Ralph Robins this Wednesday (22 May) for high level talks on the company’s business strategy.

The meeting, which will involve Opposition MPs with RR plants in their constituencies, follows an earlier one at the Commons in February when the Pendle MP welcomed a delegation of shop stewards from the Rolls Royce plant at Barnoldswick.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “I hope Sir Ralph will be able to share his insights into how the industry and the company are likely to develop over the next few years. There are lots of things to discuss including the Government’s policies towards aerospace such as launch aid and other concerns such as the challenge we are facing from countries on the Pacific Rim. We want to actively support

manufacturing industry. It is at the very top of the Opposition's agenda."

"There has been continuing concern going back a number of years now about the lack of consultation over the "downsizing" of the company and its overall corporate strategy including the the creation of 'stand alone' corporate units such as RR Aero-Engine Services and Rolls Royce Civil Engines. There is also the issue of the company's policy on takeovers and mergers and link-ups with companies such as BMW."

ends

Note to Editors: A year ago there was fury at plans to lay off 600 highly skilled research workers at the company's East Kilbride plant in Scotland.

For Immediate Release. Number: 167/96. Monday 20 May 1996

MP RAILS AT £19 BILLION GIVEAWAY

Railtrack's shares will be traded on the Stock Market for the first time today, 20 days after the privatisation was triggered with the publication of the full prospectus on 1 May.

Today's dealing in shares in Railtrack Group plc will give investors the chance to make a profit with their first dividend due on October 4 for the year ending March 1996. £100 million was earmarked last year for track improvements but £69m was held back by the Government (while Railtrack was in public ownership) and will now be spent on dividend payments.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The Government has sold the nation's railway for a song. The cost of replacing what the nation is giving up is a colossal £19 billion. Yet all the Government expects to receive is something under £2 billion - all of it to be used in tax cuts to bribe the electorate in the run up to the General Election."

"The 600,000 people who bought Railtrack shares did so with their eyes open and in the full knowledge that an incoming Labour Government will regulate the industry to ensure that profits are not creamed off at the expense of investment in the railway infrastructure."

"Since 1979, the Conservatives have flogged off £80 billion of public assets in the biggest fire sale in living memory. The whole thing has been an absolute disgrace. We have all been ripped off, right left and centre."

For Immediate Release. Number: 168/96. Monday 20 May 1996

MP OFFERS NEW DEAL FOR A LOST GENERATION

Britain is facing a crisis of a lost generation according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said we would all pay the price for the alienation and deprivation young people experience.

The MP said: “The cost is a staggering £10 billion a year - paid in unemployment, crime and deprivation.”

“Britain must break the vicious cycle of low skills, unemployment and social division which, if unaddressed, will haunt us for a generation and threaten to tear our communities apart. And Britain must not lose the economic race for the future. With a smaller share of 16 and 17 year olds in full time education than any OECD country except Turkey, we need nothing short of an educational and skills revolution.”

“A nation's young people should be one of its greatest assets, but Britain's young people are not given the opportunity to succeed. Unemployment amongst young people is twice as high as for the rest of the working population. 600,000 people aged 18-25 are unemployed. That's one in six of the age group. 265,000 people aged 18-25 have been unemployed for over 6 months and 135,000 people aged 18-25 have been unemployed for over 1 year.

“Every major industrial nation (G7) has more people in full time post 16 education than the UK. Last year, for the first time in living memory, the percentage of post 16 year olds in full time education fell. One third of young people do not even get to NVQ level 2 or above by the age of 19 (equivalent to five GCSE passes, grades C or above). And less than half (46%) of people who begin Youth Training complete it.” (Dearing Review)

“Young people are more likely to commit crime than others - young people
more follows

aged 14-25 accounted for 60% of indictable offences in 1993.”

“The most recent Home Office Survey found that eight out of ten (78%) of males who admitted to truancy once or more a week had committed

offences. Nearly 60% of convicted youths aged 16 or 17, were unemployed on the date of their sentence.

“Labour’s aims are clear: we want more young people in education and less on benefits. We want every young person to continue in some form of education after 16. By 2000 we want to have one of the world's highest rates for staying on in full time education. But people who leave school at 16 must also be enabled to improve their skills and reach at least NVQ level 2, through replacing Youth Training with a more effective programme for young people, and through day release for those in work.”

“We want every young person to be in a job or in training. Young people under 25 unemployed for more than six months will be offered a job or training under our rights for responsibilities plan, with our four options funded by the proceeds of a windfall tax on the excess profits of the privatised utilities.”

“The cost of getting our young people trained and into worthwhile work will be high. But the cost of doing nothing will be a lot higher” mused the MP.

For Immediate Release. Number: 169/96. Monday 20 May 1996

“IT HURT BUT IT WORKED” SLOGAN RIDICULED BY MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has ridiculed the Conservatives’ Campaign slogan “Yes it Hurt, Yes it Worked.”

Speaking on Saturday (18 May) at Pendle’s historic Clarion House, home of the old ILP, the Independent Labour Party, the MP said: “This absurd slogan will cut no ice with the British people. In truth, it has been all pain and no gain. And there is more pain to come.”

“Before a May 1997 General Election, the Conservatives will saddle British voters with a tax shock. The average family will pay another £670 in additional taxes. Council tax will rise by an average of 6.2% in England. Two and a half million people will experience unemployment. 50,000 more families will have their homes repossessed and altogether 120,000 families will find themselves homeless.”

“Up to 700,000 young people will not be in work or receive any training or education. More than 10,000 pupils can be expected to be excluded from school. Five million more crimes will be reported including 200,000 more assaults and over a million burglaries. In the

NHS, 8,500 NHS hospital beds will be lost and £1.5 billion wasted on the NHS internal market."

"Up to 5,000 small firms will go bust because of late payment and the UK will import £15 billion more than it exports."

The MP concluded: "Saatchi and Saatchi would be hard pressed to come up with a catchy slogan based on that catalogue of failure. So they have just invented an economic recovery and a ludicrous slogan to go with it and hope it will do the trick. Their contempt for the intelligence of the British people is awesome."

For Immediate Release. Number: 170/96. Monday 20 May 1996

BARROWFORD CHAPEL RESURRECTED IN JAPAN

Barrowford's Methodist Chapel, demolished in the 80s, has risen again and found a new life as a hotel half way around the world on the outskirts of Tokyo.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, met the new owner, Japanese hotelier Mr Takeuchi, at the Commons today and gave him and his party afternoon tea.

The MP said: "I was intrigued to hear about the old chapel and what had become of it. Mr Takeuchi obviously has a yen for the unusual. It is now part of his new hotel which will be officially opened on 2 September. I am told the hotel is likely to be a favourite destination for newly married couples."

"Some of the people who stay at the hotel in Japan will probably want to visit the site of the Chapel's earlier existence as a place of worship. It could well boost tourism in the area."

Note to Editor of Nelson Leader: A photograph of the rebuilt chapel follows under separate cover..

For Immediate Release. Number: 171/96. Tuesday 21 May 1996

RADON RISK IN PENDLE HOMES IS SLIGHT says MP

The risk of Radon in Pendle homes at levels where it could pose a threat to health is slight says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster after analysing data released by the Government last week which showed 4,900 dwellings or 13% of all

Pendle's homes had a small probability (between 1%-3%) of being above the Government's action level where remedial work on the building is recommended.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas which is a product of the radioactive decay of uranium. It is found in small quantities in all rocks and soils. The gas disperses quickly in the open air, but can accumulate in buildings, especially in areas where the underlying ground contains more uranium than average and is permeable. Radon is a cause for concern because exposure to the gas over time increases the risk of lung cancer, particularly among smokers.

In Pendle the chance of houses being above the Government set Action Level is comparatively small (between 1% and 3%). Next door, in Craven, the number of homes affected is significantly higher. In Craven 12,100 of all dwellings (52%) have a 1%-3% probability of being above the Action Level. A further 4,400 properties (19%) have a probability of between 3% and 10% of being above the level and 200 homes (1%) have a probability of between 10% and 30% of being over the Action Level.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The Government will be sending invitations to the 100,000 householders most affected nationwide offering free Radon measurements. Those who do not receive one of these invitations should be reassured by the fact that their homes are not among those most likely to be affected. I am told that Radon concentrations can be easily reduced in the home and can be undertaken by local builders within a day or two. This is obviously very reassuring."
more follows:

RADON RISK

Note to Editors: New booklets "The Householder Guide to Radon" and "A Guide to Reducing Levels in Your Home" will be sent to householders, whose homes are found to be above the Action Level.

The Government has advised as follows:

What is radon? Radon is a natural radioactive gas which has no taste, smell or colour. It originates from the radioactive decay of uranium, which is found in small quantities in all rocks and soils. It disperses quickly in the open, but can accumulate in buildings. When radon decays, the decay products, known as radon daughters, attach to minute natural aerosol particles. These may be inhaled and deposited in the lungs.

Why is it considered a problem? Radon gas seeps into houses from the ground and decays to radon daughters, which can be breathed in. The health consequence from exposure to radon daughters is an increased risk of developing lung cancer. Health studies of miners provide evidence of a causal relationship between exposure to radon. A recent study of people exposed to radon in homes in Sweden has confirmed the risk from domestic radon. Further information about health risks from radon can be obtained by telephoning the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) Radon Hotline on 0800 614529.

Where is the problem? The NRPB estimates that there are some 100,000 homes with radon concentrations above the "Action Level" of 200 Becquerels per cubic metre of air (Bq m/3). Most (80%) of these are likely to be located in Cornwall and Devon and parts of Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Somerset. However, NRPB have now completed a mapping exercise of the whole of England and this has identified other areas where houses may have high radon concentrations.

What is the Action Level? The Government accepted the recommendation of its advisers on radiological matters, the NRPB, that action should be taken to reduce doses from radon in existing houses with the highest concentrations and to limit exposure in dwellings to be built in the future. The Action Level is set at 200 Bq m/3, averaged over a year. It is the basis for providing advice regarding remedial measures. In addition, the Building Regulations require precautions to be taken to minimise radon entry in new homes in designated areas.

What is the risk of contracting lung cancer from radon? The potential risks of contracting lung cancer from exposure to radon are calculated over a life-time. The increased risk is about ten times greater for smokers than non-smokers. The risk of contracting lung cancer, after a lifetime of exposure to radon at the Action Level, is about 30 in 1,000 for the general population.

For Immediate Release. Number: 172/96. Tuesday 21 May 1996

GOVERNMENT DROPS TAX BOMBSHELL ONTO PENDLE'S ELDERLY says MP

The Government has revealed the true cost of being old in Pendle says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The cost is a staggering £63 million bill for the owner occupied pensioner only households in Pendle according to the area's MP who has analysed the consequences of the Government's consultation document on paying for long term care, published earlier this month.

“A typical pensioner couple in Britain will have to pay on average an insurance premium of £10,000 or more to protect their home if they need long term care. If they don't pay up, they may be forced to sell their home when they need residential care.”

“On the Government's own figures, 6,300 retired homeowners in Pendle will have to find up to £63 million pounds to buy care insurance over the next few years. This is a new Tory tax. A tax on being old. A tax on being a homeowner. Older people are already angry at this Government's betrayal of their generation. They believe they have already paid for their care 'from cradle to grave'. But the Government has slashed the number of NHS long-term care beds and created the long term care crisis.”

“The Government never told them - until now - that they had to pay the costs of their own long-term care. The Government never gave them the chance to prepare for the bill they have been given now. No wonder there is such an epidemic of insecurity among elderly people here in Pendle.”

“The elderly were never warned that they would have to meet the cost of care bills. Instead, 40,000 a year have had to sell their homes to pay for residential care. The Government has failed to plan for an ageing population and is responsible for the crisis in long term care.”

more follows

GOVERNMENT DROPS TAX BOMBSHELL ONTO PENDLE’S ELDERLY

“The Government has created a care gap. The NHS has savagely cut continuing care beds by a third since 1988 and the internal market provides perverse incentives to rapid discharge of elderly patients. Now care that was once free because the NHS provided it, is being charged for outside the health service.”

“They have created a national lottery in community care. Now elderly people find themselves in a grotesque game of pass the buck between health and local authorities. The Government's refusal to determine nationally what should be provided for by the NHS means that the place you live determines the care you get and the price you pay.”

“The Government has failed to provide real choice in community care services. Community care was supposed to mean less institutionalisation. Instead there are perverse financial incentives towards expensive residential care and a lack of care choice. They have encouraged a huge growth in the private market for elderly care but failed to regulate it to give proper protection to the most vulnerable.”

The MP continued: “A Labour Government will end the lottery in community care provision. We back the Health Select Committee's call for nationally-agreed eligibility criteria to define what the NHS as a national service will always provide and a Long Term Care Charter to define the responsibilities of health, housing and social services. With Labour there will be a one nation NHS where access to care is a matter of right not a matter of chance.”

Note to Editors: The Government’s proposals in "A New Partnership for Care in Old Age" explicitly shift the costs of providing for old age from the state to the individual. Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell said: "The Government believes that the principal responsibility for making that provision must rest with the individual citizen...We shall continue to provide a safety net."

The key proposal is that someone who buys an insurance policy which will pay out, say, £40,000 will be able to protect £60,000 of their home from means-testing. But a pensioner couple is likely to have to find over £10,000 to pay enough insurance to protect the value of their home. The Government’s plan is unlikely to reach the majority of elderly homeowners who fear they will need long-term care. Many may own their homes, but have low pensions and few if any savings. The Government has made no specific proposals to help them. Help the Aged said the plans were 'directionless' and that many pensioners would not be able to afford such a solution.

For Immediate Release. Number: 173/96. Tuesday 21 May 1996

ROLLS ROYCE IN AERO ENGINE LINK UP WITH CHINA

Rolls-Royce is to link up with a Chinese company to form a joint venture operation making components for RR's aero engines.

According to latest Press Association reports, Mr Zhu Yuli, president of Aviation Industries of China (AVIC) and Gordon Gurr, president of Rolls-Royce China, announced the planned venture in Beijing in the presence of deputy prime minister Michael Heseltine.

PA quotes Mr Gurr saying: “Rolls-Royce is developing its partnership with China further. It is a strategic alliance that recognises China's plan to develop a world-class aero engine industry. We have a vision that one day AVIC and Rolls-Royce will design and build a complete new engine together.”

The factory will begin production in 1998 and generate £13.1 million a year of foreign currency from export sales. Mr Zhu Yuli described the deal as the most prominent between the aviation industries of China and Britain for nearly 20 years and that it was only the beginning. He said he hoped the co-operation would lead to a centre of excellence "to produce high quality aero products for the world markets."

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency is home to the Rolls Royce plant at Barnoldswick, is to meet the RR chief, Sir Ralph Robins, tomorrow at the company's London HQ.

The MP said: "I am very interested in hearing more about this deal with the Chinese. I want to know what impact it will have on RR operations here in the UK."

Number: 174/96. EMBARGOED: Wednesday 22 May 1996

AUDIT COMMISSION SLATES GP FUNDHOLDING

The Audit Commission's report on GP fundholding, published today, is a devastating indictment of Conservative NHS reforms says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Audit Commission says GP fundholding increases administration and bureaucracy at every level - hospital, health authority and practice and that it provides no benefits to patients. It says GPs should work in practice with Health Authorities to shape hospital services - in effect, Labour's policy of GP commissioning.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This report is scathing in its condemnation of Conservative reforms. It says few practices are working well: "It is relatively easy to recognise the best practices... but such practices are rare...The majority of fundholding practices do not appear to be especially good at management and networking or achieving a large number of benefits for patients". (p 87)

The MP commented: "This report confirms my own experience. Back in early March I consulted my local GPs on the future of the family doctor services. It is clear to me there is dissatisfaction with the present set up."

"The GPs here in Pendle are providing vital health care. They are in touch with their patients and they know what is going on. But the Government never seems to listen to them."

The MP pledged: “I want to see a situation where all GPs will have a say in shaping local hospital services. They will have equal access for their patients to hospital services. They can innovate and develop the services they provide to their patients. Where GPs will play a part in the local health strategy for improving health of local people.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 175/96. Wed 22 May 1996

ROLLS ROYCE PAINTS ROSY PICTURE OF FUTURE PROSPECTS says PENDLE MP

The Rolls Royce plant at Barnoldswick is absolutely central to the company’s future plans according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking earlier today after a high level meeting with Rolls Royce chiefs, led by John Rose, the Managing Director of the Aerospace Group. “I was told what I already know - that Barlick’s wide chord fan blade is a world beater.”

The MP said: “I was concerned about about the Chinese link-up announced on Monday, about technology transfer and what the effect would be on jobs here in the UK. I was given the reassurances I wanted to hear.”

“The Company told us they had turned the corner after a few difficult years during which time the workforce, the floor space and the number of machine tools had shrunk by 30%. Rolls was now aiming to grow the business by sharpening competitiveness, improving profitability and, where it is in their interests, by entering into collaborative ventures.”

“Mr Rose confirmed the size of the blue collar workforce was stable with the prospect of future growth and that the company would retain all the sites they have at present. He said they were not in the business of giving away core capabilities and he included the leading edge fan blade technology. In this area we are well ahead of the field.”

“The company’s strategy is to concentrate on its core business, focussing on high value added components which RR should design and manufacture and which were “performance differentiators” - those that make the difference between aero-engines. Rolls will be taking on 100 graduates and 100 apprentices this year a sure sign the company was “back in business”.”

The MP concluded: “ I was encouraged by what I heard. No doubt about it.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 176/96. Wed 22 May 1996

BEEF CRISIS DEEPENS AS PM PULLS THE PLUG ON EUROPE

There should be an immediate lifting of the EU ban on beef says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, but government incompetence cannot be allowed to block European measures that are in Britain's vital national interest.

The Pendle MP, newly appointed to the Agriculture Select Committee, warns we would be cutting off our nose to spite our face if we vetoed measures that were clearly in our national interests. “On 3 June European finance ministers will be discussing new regulations to crack down on fraud: is Ken Clarke going to veto these?”

“Will Ministers veto the Insolvency Convention - an agreement we have waited 30 years for? Will they veto the new action plan for cooperation with Canada, a member of the Commonwealth?”

“The government's strongest card seems to be its claim that it will stop progress at the Inter-Governmental Conference. But there are no votes coming up at the IGC in the foreseeable future. And the Prime Minister has made clear he will continue to send a British representative and set out the government's case.”

The MP added: “The beef ban costs Britain £700 million. Lifting the ban on derivatives - which has already been agreed by the Commission and a majority of member states - would only bring back £35 million. Lifting the ban on the beef trade has to be the top priority.”

“Britain’s vital interests cannot be held hostage by a small group of right wing Tory Eurosceptics. If John Major cannot govern in the national interest without risking our vital interests then he should call an election and go.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 177/96. Wed 22 May 1996

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO CEMFUEL REPORT DELAYED YET AGAIN

The Government’s long awaited response the to report of the Environment Select Committee into the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns has been delayed again. The Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has found that the publication date has slipped into June - a full year after the Committee’s original report.

The exasperated MP commented: “The Government’s response to the report is of the greatest importance - especially in view of the

forthcoming public hearing on the problem of plume grounding at Castle Cement's works at Clitheroe."

"On 5 December last year I asked the Minister when I could expect sight of the Government's reply to the Committee's report which was itself published on 7 June 1995. I was told the Government expected "to make a full response early in the new year." On 13 March I asked again and was told "the Government expects to publish its response in the next few weeks". I was unhappy with the constant delays and successfully called for a Commons debate on the issue. In my adjournment debate in the Commons on 20 March, my colleague Andrew Bennett MP was told it would be available "very soon". Then I was assured I would have it by the end of May. Now it is to be June."

"Heaven knows what is taking the time. No-one is expecting War and Peace."

Note to Editors: On 8 May the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, decided that the appeal by Castle Cement against the conditions imposed by the Pollution Inspectorate on the operation of the plant in Clitheroe would be held in public.

For Immediate Release. Number: 178/96. Tuesday 28 May 1996

MP SEEKS INQUIRY INTO HAWK JET CRASH AT AIRSHOW

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for an investigation into the crash of a British Hawk jet at an airshow in Portugal at the weekend. The pilot ejected safely at the Beja air base, 110 miles south-east of Lisbon.

The accident is reported to have happened when the fast jet trainer narrowly missed a Portuguese air force F-16 jet during manoeuvres.

The MP said: "The Hawk was the 10th British military plane to crash this year. We are not half way through 1996 yet we have lost more planes than in the whole of 1995. This Hawk trainer cost just over £10m - not far short of the annual budget of Pendle Council."

"I have been in touch with Ministers recently about the RAF's fast jet maintenance programme which has been privatised. I am very concerned indeed about overall safety standards. Corners must not be cut to save money. It may save a pound or two in the short term but in the long run it can cost lives."

“I intend to raise the whole issue of safety standards and the enormous increase in fast jet losses during the forthcoming Commons debate on the RAF on 6 June. I shall also be returning to the question of low flying over West Craven. There is no good reason for it and it is potentially dangerous - as these crashes demonstrate all too graphically.”

Note to Editors: In March a Hawk jet trainer crashed shortly after setting off from RAF Valley Anglesey. It was later reported that vital controls had not been reconnected after maintenance.

For Immediate Release. Number: 179/96. Tuesday 28 May 1996

GOVERNMENT RUNNING SCARED ON DIRECT PAYMENTS claims PRENTICE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused the Government of delaying progress on the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill because Ministers are afraid of a further defeat on the floor of the House of Commons. The Government has a majority of one.

The Bill allows local authorities to make direct payments to disabled people who are willing to receive them in lieu of community care services. It has been broadly welcomed by the organisations that provide services and by disabled people themselves.

“It is now month since the Bill finished its Committee stage. We are now into the Whitsun recess and the Bill has now disappeared into the ether” says Prentice. “There is no excuse for this delay. Ministers clearly want to ban local councils from making direct payments to disabled people over the age of 65. This is unacceptable.”

“Local authorities should be allowed to make direct payments to all disabled people willing and able to manage their own care.”

“Ministers failure to make progress with the Bill is causing concern to many of the disabled people who are keen to take up direct payments and it may delay the implementation of direct payment schemes” said the MP.

For Immediate Release. Number: 180/96. Tuesday 28 May 1996

“FACE THE FACTS” PUTS CEMFUEL UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The burning by Castle Cement of the controversial fuel “Cemfuel” at the company’s Clitheroe plant is to be examined by BBC Radio 4’s

award winning “Face the Facts” programme tomorrow evening at 7.20pm. (Wednesday 29 May 1996).

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose Commons adjournment debate on 20 March sparked renewed interest in the long running saga, will be explaining to presenter John Waite what needs to happen next if Ribble Valley people and his own constituents are to be reassured there is no threat to health.

On 9 May, the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, agreed that the appeal by Castle Cement against conditions imposed by the Pollution Inspectorate on the operation of the plant in Clitheroe would to be held in public.

Note to Editors: The deadline had been imposed in January by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Pollution (now part of the Environment Agency) but Castle Cement said they could not meet it. Castle Cement also want to relax the limit on sulphur emissions and want to relax the condition that the electrostatic precipitators should be operational all the time. The company also wants more flexibility in the composition of cemfuel.

For Immediate Release. Number: 181/96. Tuesday 28 May 1996

LABOUR TO TACKLE YOUTH CRIME WITH MAJOR REFORM OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is canvassing the views of Pendle people on Labour’s new proposals for tackling youth crime.

Speaking in Nelson this week, the MP said: “Youth crime is a major problem in Pendle as it is across the country. But, as our new report shows, the present system is in disarray. It serves neither the need for crime control, nor the interests of victims, the community or offender. And it’s hopeless at dealing with persistent young offenders.”

“Too many youngsters end up in prison because the present system fails to nip offending in the bud. With our plans for youth employment and training, the youth service, truanting and drugs, Labour’s new proposals should work to cut down the numbers of those who end up in a life of crime.”

The shake-up, announced last week by Shadow Home Secretary and Blackburn MP, Jack Straw, includes: • repeat cautions replaced by a

Final Warning, triggering intervention; • a fast track for persistent offenders; • a better range of non-custodial sentences; • clearer court powers for using secure accommodation and • a new National Board for Youth Justice to set national standards to ensure effective action to tackle youth crime.

The MP added: "These proposals are out for consultation. I would welcome hearing the views of my constituents on them."

For Immediate Release. Number: 182/96. Tuesday 4 June 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT KELBROOK PRIMARY SCHOOL ON FRIDAY 7 JUNE AT 7.30PM

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining in the centenary celebrations of Kelbrook County Primary School when he meets the children, staff and parents at a "Victorian Musical Evening" in the school hall at 7.30pm on Friday 7 June.

The MP said: "I am looking forward immensely to the evening which promises to be great fun. It is one of a series of events to mark the centenary of the school which opened its doors for the first time on 1 June 1896."

Note to Editors: Contact the Headteacher, Wendy Harvey.

For Immediate Release. Number: 183/96. Wed 29 May 1996

"WATER CHEEK!": BONUSES FOR YORKSHIRE WATER CHIEFS LEAVES MP GASPING WITH ASTONISHMENT

News that the directors of Yorkshire Water have been paid bonuses for their handling of last year's drought has infuriated Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, part of whose constituency is served by the beleaguered company.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency today the MP said: "I have no quarrel with the employees of Yorkshire Water who lay the pipes and dig the holes - nor with their back up people. But the idea that bonuses should go to the directors who landed us in the mess in the first place is pure Monty Python!"

Earlier this month the company was criticised by Professor John Uff over its handling of last summer's drought and its failure to anticipate the crisis. Professor Luff chaired an inquiry which concluded that

company executives underestimated the demand for water, failed to impose restrictions until too late and had not devised an emergency plan.

“My colleague Alice Mahon, the Labour MP for Halifax, hit the nail on the head when she said that any extra money in the company should go to reducing bills, or into making sure the water supply is always going to be there when we need it. I’d like to know how big these bonuses are. Yorkshire Water are being very tight-lipped and we shall have to wait until the company publishes its accounts in July to get the details.”

“The directors of Yorkshire Water have a brass neck. At the end of the day its the customers who are paying for their bonuses.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 184/96. Wed 29 May 1996

NUCLEAR SELL OFF SLAMMED BY MP

The sale of British Energy which gets under way this week has been savaged by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims the most modern nuclear power stations are being sold on the cheap with the old Magnox reactors - with their expensive decommissioning costs - staying in public ownership.

The MP fumed: “The English language is inadequate to describe the scale of the rip-off that is happening under our noses. The rail sell-off was grand larceny but the nuclear rip-off adds the new dimension of bare faced cheek!”

“The company has been “valued” at between £1.5 and £2.1 billion which is substantially less than the £3 billion cost to the taxpayer of building just one pressurised water reactor at Sizewell B. The £4m advertising campaign talks about the “last burst of energy” but doesn’t even mention the word “nuclear”. The poor old taxpayer is to keep the clapped out Magnox stations which are to remain the responsibility of the state.”

“The idea that the privatisation of the nuclear industry will transfer risk to the private sector is laughable. With an industry like this where safety is absolutely paramount, the Government could not stand aside if things started to go wrong.”

“Everything that isn’t nailed down is being sold off in advance of the General Election to provide the tax cuts which the Conservatives hope

will deliver a fifth election victory. The whole exercise is cynical and manipulative."

Note to Editors: The prospectus is to be published on 10 June with trading in the shares beginning in mid July.

For Immediate Release. Number: 185/96. Monday 3 June 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE "PUSHING THE TEA TROLLEY" AT 4PM ON FRIDAY 7 JUNE AT FAVORDALE OLD PEOPLE'S HOME, COLNE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the Women's Royal Voluntary Service tenth Volunteers Week.

He will be joining the WRVS volunteers, doing the rounds with the Trolley Service at Favordale House Old People's Home, Colne.

The MP said: "The WRVS is a splendid organisation doing a marvellous job, locally and nationally. I am looking forward to meeting everyone at Favordale."

Contacts: Mrs Doreen Speke on 01282 867209 or Justine McGuiness on 0171 416 0146

For Immediate Release. Number: 186/96. Monday 3 June 1996

WATCHDOG DRENCHES YORKSHIRE WATER IN CRITICISM

The water watchdog, OFWAT, today slammed Yorkshire Water over its "serious failures" to counter the effects of last summer's drought. OFWAT's director, Ian Byatt, said the company failed to control leaks, deal with unplanned interruptions of supply and control floods from sewers.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "It is about time the watchdog started to bark. Last week we found out about the bonuses that the company was paying to its employees - including the directors - as a thank you for their efforts in keeping the water flowing last summer. Now OFWAT tells us that Yorkshire has agreed not to raise prices by more than inflation in 1997/98. It is not a question of pegging increases but getting refunds if we don't get the water we all pay for."

The MP continued: "Mr Byatt has apparently said he would be keeping a "beady eye" on Yorkshire Water and what they intend to do about

leakage. It's a pity he turned a blind eye to the company's failings up until now. We are told prices will go up at the rate of inflation but Yorkshire will still be coining it. The company clocked up £141m profits last year."

The MP added: "The news that Ofwat is to force Yorkshire Water to plug its leaks is welcome, but the regulator has been slow to act. He should never have allowed this shambles to develop in the first place."

Note to editors: Yorkshire Water said prices going up by the rate of inflation would cut their income by £40 million over the three years to the year 2000 while it would cost £50 million to meet the agreed targets for better standards of service. Profits for the last financial year are expected to show a fall to £141 million from £152 million the year before.

For Immediate Release. Number: 187/96. Tuesday 4 June 1996

MP STEPS INTO ROW OVER "MAYOR'S FIVER"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has stepped into the simmering row over the "Mayor's fiver" - the annual Christmas bonus given to Pendle's over eighties. The Liberal controlled council wants to scrap the bonus, pleading poverty.

The MP commented: "My local council is run by a bunch of Christmas scrooges. They say they can't afford this modest pay-out to the elderly folk of Pendle. Yet the very same people recently spent £20,000 redecorating a lovely old committee room at Nelson town hall, turning it into a 1960s pastiche complete with polystyrene ceiling tiles. They have their priorities all wrong."

"You can bet your bottom dollar the Liberals will not be claiming responsibility for the £5 snatch. After a decent interval, we will see Focus leaflets blaming it all on the Mayor."

Note to Editors: The decision is to be made on 11 June.

What the Liberals say on the £5 bonus snatch:
"This is a nettle which has to be grasped... We have to make cuts and there can be no exceptions."
Councillor Tony Greaves
Nelson Leader 24 May 1996

"It is a question of whether we have the moral courage to do it."

Councillor Tim Haigh
Nelson Leader 24 May 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 188/96. Tuesday 4 June 1996

PRENTICE SLAMS GOVERNMENT OVER BSE FEEDSTUFFS BAN

The possession of animal feedstuffs that cause BSE is to be made a criminal offence in July. Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg told his EU counterparts earlier this week the suspect feed would be banned.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who is a member of the Agriculture Select Committee commented: "This is progress but why on earth wasn't this done years ago when the connection between the contaminated feedstuff and BSE was first established? Why wasn't it at the very least announced on 20 March when the BSE crisis broke?"

Mammalian protein - ground-up bone meal and other unwanted animal parts - has been banned from feeding to cattle since 1989. But reports suggest there are still considerable stocks around the country.

The MP added: "I have today asked the Minister how much contaminated feed is still in farmers' stores and barns and how much he estimates has been fed to cattle since the ban was introduced in 1989. The Government's protestations that they have done everything possible to eradicate the BSE epidemic rings rather hollow when the stuff that is causing the problem - the contaminated feed - is still around."

For Immediate Release. Number: 189/96. Tuesday 4 June 1996

PRENTICE CLASHES WITH PM OVER LOTTERY PROFITS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has clashed with the Prime Minister over the huge profits being run up by the lottery organisers, Camelot.

In the Commons earlier today, the Pendle MP asked the Prime Minister: "Isn't it the case that after tax profits of £1 million a week and bonuses of £100,000 to the directors of Camelot are quite unacceptable. Surely every pound that goes in profit is a pound less for good causes? Shouldn't the lottery be run on a nonprofit basis giving more money to good causes and less to the fat cats."

Speaking afterwards the MP said: "The lottery is a license to print money - for the people who are running it."

"Camelot is failing in its licence obligation to give 28% of total sales to good causes yet the current shortfall stands at £45m."

Note to Editors: The National Lottery company, Camelot, made £77.5 million in profit and the directors will be getting a 50% bonus on their £200,000 salaries.

For Immediate Release. Number: 190/96. Wed 5 June 1996

SOARING MORTGAGE REPOSSESSIONS CONFIRM HOUSING CRISIS IN PENDLE

Latest figures from Nelson County Court show Pendle's housing crisis is getting worse says local MP, Gordon Prentice. "Here in Pendle last year, 209 families lost their homes - repossessed by the bank or building society. This compares with 175 in 1994 and 193 in 1993."

"The figure represents mortgage misery for hundreds of families here on our own doorstep. People forced out of their own homes. It is an absolute tragedy."

The MP continued: "A generation ago, when Labour was last in power, there were fewer than 3,000 repossessions across the whole country. Now there are over 200 in our local county court. For every home repossessed under the last Labour Government in 1979 there are now 17 homes being repossessed under the Conservatives."

"The Prime Minister claimed in January 1992 that the repossessions had stopped. We now know he was talking through his hat. Since then hundreds of thousands of homes have been repossessed. This Government is the kiss of death to homeowners."

Note to Editors: Pendle has one of the highest rates of home ownership in the country. 86% of the housing stock is private (75% for the North West Region and 76% for England). In the private sector in Pendle, tenure breaks down as follows: 92% owner occupied (87% NW region and 84% England) and 8% rented (13% NW region and 16% England).

No:191/96. EMBARGOED UNTIL 3.30pm Thursday 6 June 96

GOVERNMENT SAYS BURNING CEMFUEL IN CEMENT KILNS IS SAFE

The Government's long awaited response to the report of the Environment Select Committee on the burning of secondary liquid fuels

in cement kilns is published today. The key conclusion is the Government's insistence that the fuel is safe and can be burnt without harming in any way human or animal health.

The Government recognises there are outstanding problems at the Clitheroe plant - most notably concerning plume-grounding - but says these matters are the subject of an appeal by Castle Cement and will be considered in a public hearing.

As an outspoken critic of the cement industry's switch to cemfuel, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said the report contained few surprises. The MP, who chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Departmental Committee said: "The concerns of people living in the area need to be tackled head on otherwise this issue will not go away. I hope the public inquiry will allow everyone's concerns to be ventilated and addressed."

"The Select Committee called on the Government to carry out a thorough survey of human and animal health in the vicinity of the kilns. The Government has taken the view that the information it already has to hand proves conclusively there is no threat to health."

The MP concluded: "Complete openness and transparency is the only way forward. I shall be watching developments very closely over the coming months. And I shall be meeting representatives of the cement industry to build confidence and ensure we understand each other."

For Immediate Release. Number: 192/96. Tuesday 11 June 1996

MP SAYS NO TO CEMENT WORKS AT KNOTTS LANE

News that Tarmac has resurrected plans to reopen the old cement works at Knotts Lane in Colne has infuriated local MP, Gordon Prentice. He has told local residents he is backing them all the way - up to and including a public inquiry. "I have offered to speak at any inquiry in support of the residents" said the MP.

The MP commented: "I am in touch with Sheila Smith and other residents to offer my support. I have asked the council for a note on the legal powers open to it to resist this totally inappropriate land use. The question of compensation may arise but I don't want the council to shelter behind this possibility as an excuse for inaction. I want the council to stand firm behind local people and reject Tarmac's planning application."

In April 1994 the MP made it clear he was backing moves by Pendle Council to stop Tarmac turning the residential area into a filthy, dusty and dangerous industrial estate. At the time he said: "Reopening the plant will mean heavy lorries, laden with cement, trundling up and down Knotts Lane with all the horrible consequences that entails."

Speaking at Westminster today the MP added: "I have made my position absolutely clear two years ago. I want to see Tarmac go to an industrial site in the Borough where they can't do any harm. Knotts Lane is a residential area and the cement works is a totally inappropriate use."

The controversial issue is to be considered by the Colne Area Committee on 3 July 1996.

Note to Editors: A meeting of the Council's Planning Committee on 25 April 1994 voted unanimously to defer consideration of a planning application from the company so that further alternatives could be explored.

The controversial proposal was back on the agenda of Pendle Council on 1 June Knotts Lane Fury

1994 when the MP urged councillors to stick to their guns. At the time he said: "The only thing that has changed over recent weeks is the political control of the authority - now run by a Liberal/Conservative coalition. Before the election, no-one wanted the cements works to reopen and blight the entire area and no-one should concede that now."

At that time (1 June 1994) the MP observed: "I am told that Tarmac will not go to Lomeshaye and they want to stay in Colne but the Council says there are no other suitable sites in the area that are available. The officers say they want a negotiated solution that would produce a cleared site available for a residential development. That's good but it is just a statement of intentions without the leverage - and the threat - of the Discontinuance Notice behind it."

Note 2 to Editors: Under section 102 of the Town and Country Planning Act a planning authority may require the discontinuance of use of land, or place conditions on its future use. A discontinuance order can authorise any current use of the land, or give permission for other development on the same land. Discontinuance orders can apply either to lawful or unlawful uses of land. If the use was unlawful, the

developer has no right to compensation. For a lawful use, compensation may be payable.

Continuing building and engineering operations are outside the scope of section 102, but a discontinuance order can require the removal or alteration of buildings or plant.

In making a discontinuance order, the local authority is to have regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations. This power cannot, therefore. be exercised on on the grounds of health and safety. Environmental considerations might also be excluded.

If the effect of a discontinuance order is that land cannot be used for any beneficial purpose, the owner can serve a purchase notice on the local authority.

A discontinuance order only takes effect when the Environment Secretary has confirmed it. He may modify the order, and any planning permission granted with it. He may grant some other planning permission. The person on whom the order is served has the right to be heard by the Planning Inspectorate and can insist on a Public Local Inquiry.

For Immediate Release. Number: 193/96. Tuesday 11 June 1996

EDUCATION AUTHORITY TO CONSULT OVER ADMISSIONS

Lancashire County Council is to embark on a wide-ranging consultation later this year over admissions policy to county schools. The move comes in the wake of widespread dissatisfaction about the way in which admissions in Pendle are handled by the authority.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who met the chair of the County Council's Education Committee, Stan Wright, and senior officers last Friday, welcomed the consultation plan.

The MP said: "I had parents from Laneshawbridge, Trawden and Kelbrook complaining their children had been allocated places at schools on the other side of the Borough. The youngsters faced the prospect of long hours of travelling every week - passing other schools on the way - and hanging around bus stations waiting for connections."

"I am told that in Pendle 89.9% of parents got their first preference school although far too many don't even get one of their three preferences. There is clearly no right to choose - as promised by the Government - only the right to express a preference. Even that sometimes isn't enough."

“The local secondary school heads have pressed for a review given all the local upset and I back them.”

“Whatever system is devised it must be transparent and fair to all concerned. Parents and their children have a right to know where they stand - and so indeed do the schools.”

Note to Editors: Changes to the admission criteria requires formal consultation with the Governing Bodies of the schools concerned and the parents.

For Immediate Release. Number: 194/96. Tuesday 11 June 1996

INDEPENDENT REPORT POINTS TO DEEP POVERTY IN UK

A new report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reveals there are now 14 million adults and children - a quarter of the population - whose net incomes are less than half the national average. At the same time the Public Accounts Committee last week highlighted the £1.4 billion a year being lost through Income Support fraud.

Commenting on the latest revelations, Pendle MP Gordon Prentice, said: “Peter Lilley - who continues to deny that poverty even exists - has simultaneously presided over a massive increase in poverty and huge rises in social security spending. Yet his have failed to prevent a massive growth in benefit fraud. Millions of pounds have been lost through inaccurate benefit payments and there has been a doubling of dependency on benefits since 1979.”

“The real way to get people out of poverty is to help them move into work. Under this Government people are frequently penalised for helping themselves. The inflexibility of the social security system means, for example, that people who accept casual or low paid jobs for a few hours a week are often penalised for doing so. The benefit system should help people move into work, not trap them in dependency.”

Note to Editors: The new Rowntree report on poverty: making ends meet is
based on 2,000 in-depth interviews with people on limited incomes, the report showed the lengths that people will go to in order to provide the best they can for their children. Strategies used by people living in poverty to make ends meet include: •doing without heating in cold weather; •shopping little and often so that stocks of food do not get eaten too quickly; •not taking partners or children to the supermarket to avoid any unnecessary spending.

For Immediate Release. Number: 195/96. Tuesday 11 June 1996

STAGECOACH TIMETABLES TO BE SCRUTINISED BY MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, wants "timely advance notice" from the bus operator Stagecoach of any job losses or timetable changes in the local area.

Mr Prentice called the bluff of the multi-millionaire Stagecoach chief, Brian Souter, who sent an information pack to the MP detailing facts and figures about the company, promising further information should it be requested.

The MP said: "I was quick to take up Mr Souter's offer. Stagecoach has been bad medicine all over the country and the company has had more references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission than I have had hot dinners. The Government has created a situation where powerful regional bus monopolies are taking hold all over Britain. Stagecoach had 3.9% market share of the bus industry in 1989. Last year it was 13.4%. Publicly owned companies have shrunk from 30.4% in 1989 to 7.5% last year. Lots of local bus companies have been swallowed up by the likes of Stagecoach."

"The decision by Pendle Liberals to sell our stake in the local bus company to the most voracious predator in the industry has obviously made life much more difficult for other municipal bus companies in the area. Our company was profitable and paid a healthy dividend year on year. Clearly, if Stagecoach is aiming for a stranglehold in Lancashire then we need to look at referring any takeover bids to the MMC."

Note to Editors: Burnley and Pendle with a fleet of 101 vehicles regularly turned in a healthy profit and its pre-tax profit margin was 5.1% in 1994; 4.1% in 1993 and 6.8% in 1992. Other local bus companies were not doing so well. Pre tax profits for Hyndburn with its 87 buses were -4.4% in 1994; 2.4% in 1993 and 4% in 1992. The comparable figures for Rossendale are 0.5%; 0% and 0%. The figures are from the recent Transport Select Committee report on the consequences of bus deregulation. Liberal Eastbourne still runs its own municipal bus company.

For Immediate Release. Number: 196/96. Monday 10 June 1996

MP DEMANDS CRACKDOWN ON FRAUD

Local MP Gordon Prentice is demanding a crackdown on benefits fraud which he says has never been higher.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today the MP said: “There are no ifs or buts when it comes to fraud. There are people who are knowingly ripping off the system and they need to be caught. Every £1 wrongly spent by the DSS or lost through fraud is £1 less for those in real need.”

A report last week from the Commons Public Accounts Committee condemned the Government's failure to prevent enormous losses to the public purse from the overpayment of benefits and fraud.

The MP continued: “Levels of fraud are enormous - an estimated £1.4 billion a year on Income Support alone. And overpayments of Income Support due to Benefits Agency inefficiency amount to more than £500 million a year.”

“The Government is long on rhetoric but short on practical action. After 17 years in office they have no-one to blame but themselves. Their record is woeful.”

ends

Note to Editors: The new PAC report reinforces the findings of the recent Social Security Select Committee inquiry into Housing Benefit fraud. After investigating the work of Labour local authorities in successfully tracking down Housing Benefit fraud the Select Committee concluded that the government's estimate of £1 billion being lost through such fraud is unrealistic, stating: "It is possible that the true total is £2 billion, perhaps even greater"

For Immediate Release. Number: 197/96. Wed 12 June 1996

UNEMPLOYMENT DIPS IN PENDLE

Unemployment in Pendle dipped slightly last month to 2,144 (6%) compared with 2,281 in April (6.2%). 1,637 (7.6%) men are out of work and claiming benefit and 507 women (3.6%). There were 99 vacancies at the Job Centre in Colne and 266 at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “The number out of work in Pendle has been over the 2,000 mark since December of last year. The November 95 figure of 1,876 unfortunately proved to be a false dawn.”

“Despite the national fall in unemployment the situation in manufacturing is not good. Some 18,000 jobs in the nation’s factories

have been lost and there may be more to come according to industry commentators."

Education and employment minister Eric Forth said today that "in a dynamic and fast moving country like Britain, people can expect to change their jobs as the economy grows".

The Pendle MP quipped: "The quicker Eric Forth is out of a job the better for the economy."

TUC general secretary John Monks said the fall was blighted by a reduction in the number of jobs in the economy. "The Chancellor must make job creating investment a priority in this year's Budget," he said.

For Immediate Release. Number: 198/96. Tuesday 11 June 1996

MP WANTS THE VIEWS OF THE BLIGHTED

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice wants to hear from people whose lives have been blighted by major infrastructure projects that take forever to get off the ground or never materialise. The eastwards extension of the M65 at Colne is a classic example of blight at work said the MP. "The proposal has now been dropped by the Government but blight still casts its long shadow over land and property."

The MP was speaking at Westminster as the Government published a discussion paper on blight. Mr Prentice is well versed on the issue after spending nine months on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Select Committee looking at the impact of the new railway on people living close to it.

The MP said: "I know from my own postbag how damaging blight can be. It can ruin a person's health with all the worry and anxiety. The uncertainty about the eastwards extension of the M65 sterilised land and property in Pendle for years - and it is still not finally resolved even though the Government has made it crystal clear the M65 is not going beyond Colne."

"The Government is now looking afresh at the law relating to blight and compensation and not before time. They want to hear from people who have something to say about the issue."

Note to Editors: Copies of the consultation paper are available from Patrick Crown, Room C16/01, Department of the Environment, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB. Comments to arrive by 31 July 1996. The Working Group was established to review "... the scope,

cause and effects of blight arising during the various stages of major infrastructure projects in order to ascertain whether any practical changes can be made to the existing national arrangements for property purchase and compensation."

For Immediate Release. Number: 199/96. Tuesday 11 June 1996

LABOUR'S HOUSING PLANS ARE RIGHT

The Labour Party's proposals to get local councils to invest the takings from the sale of council houses in building and renovation work has been backed up by a new independent Report.

The Chartered Institute of Housing Report says that councils between them have £5 billion they could invest. It also says the release of the money should be phased to make sure that councils and building firms can cope with the increased work. Councils could double their housing investment over four years.

Commenting on the Report, local MP Gordon Prentice said: "This Report confirms all that we have been saying. Labour will get councils to invest this money rather than just leave it in the bank. That would be good for people who need somewhere decent to live. It would also provide more jobs in the building industry. And that's not all. It would also provide jobs in firms who supply the building industry, whether making bricks or doors or carpets or kitchen equipment. And that means work for people here in Pendle. It's just plain common sense."

ends

Note to Editors: A new Report, published this week by the Chartered Institute of Housing, has backed Labour's policy of allowing councils to invest the takings from the sale of council houses in a new building programme to provide homes for people who need somewhere decent to live and to create jobs in the building and building supplies industries.

The Report also backs Labour's policy of releasing the takings in a phased programme - to help councils and the building industry cope with the practical problems of investing the extra resources.

more follows:

LABOUR'S HOUSING PLANS ARE RIGHT

The Chartered Institute of Housing Report says:

•there are around £5 billion of takings from the 'Right to Buy' which could be made available

•the money has not been invested in new homes, 80 Britain has far fewer social homes for rent than in 1979

•the United Kingdom has the lowest overall investment in housing of any major industrialised country

•releasing the available receipts, phased over four years, and allowing local councils to invest future takings, would enable local authorities to double their housing investment

•phasing the release of capital receipts is necessary in order to take into account the current capacity of councils to organise house building programmes and to avoid overheating the building industry

•the distribution of the capital receipts is not uniform. Some areas in housing need do have a lot of funds available. Others do not. The Report sets out alternative ways of dealing with this.

For Immediate Release. Number: 200/96. Wed 12 June 1996

VALIDITY OF KASHMIR ELECTIONS QUERIED BY MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says the recent elections in Kashmir have next to no legitimacy following reports that voters were coerced by the Indian army into going to the polling stations.

The MP has joined Walthamstow Labour MP, Neil Gerrard, and Bradford MP, Gerry Sutcliffe, in again calling for a plebiscite which would allow Kashmiris to decide their own future.

The MP, who has many constituents with family and business connections with Kashmir, has taken a close interest in the issue.

Note to Editors: The Commons Motion which appears on the Order Paper today reads: That this House notes with concern reports that at the recent elections in Kashmir people were coerced into voting by the Indian Army; believes that an election in which intimidation, threats and violence are used to force people into polling stations cannot be regarded in any way as valid; and further believes that a solution to the

problems of Kashmir will only be achieved by the Kashmiri people being allowed to freely exercise the right of self-determination of their own future.

For Immediate Release. Number: 201/96. Thursday 13 June 1996

MP CONDEMNS LIBERAL DECISION TO AXE PENSIONERS CHRISTMAS BONUS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has condemned Tuesday night's decision by the Liberal controlled Pendle Council to axe the long-standing tradition of the Mayor's fiver - the £5 Christmas Bonus to the Borough's over eighties.

The MP, enraged by the decision, has tabled a Commons motion which calls for the reinstatement of the Christmas Bonus. He says it is wholly inappropriate for the Council to spend money on gifts to the Chief Executive and other employees when the Council is axing the Mayor's Fiver and is threatening the pensioners' traditional Christmas lunches.

Note to Editors: The following motion appears on the Commons Order Paper today: PENDLE CHRISTMAS BONUS (number 2)

"This House unreservedly condemns the decision of the Liberal controlled Pendle Council to axe the traditional £5 bonus or "Mayor's fiver" given to the Borough's over eighties at Christmas; notes with regret that council leader, Alan Davies, described the gift as an anachronism from the past and that veteran Liberal, Councillor Tony Greaves, criticised opponents for lacking the courage to scrap the bonus; notes that Liberal Councillor Tim Haigh believed it was a matter of having the moral courage to cut the bonus; considers the protestations from Liberal councillors that the cut was necessary to save money do not sit well alongside the revelations in the Lancashire Evening Telegraph of 12 June 1996 that top council staff enjoyed a multi-thousand pounds knees-up hours before the decision was made to axe the Christmas bonus; finds it astonishing that in the present climate of belt tightening in Pendle, long serving Council employees received up to £300-a-head in gifts - paid for by Pendle's council taxpayers - and that the council's Chief Executive received a barbecue, painting and a lawn mower and the development director received a mountain bike and that other gifts reportedly included camcorders, hi-fis and CD systems, leather chairs and golf clubs; believes expenditure on these gifts to be wholly inappropriate at a time when the Borough's pensioners also face the possibility of having their traditional Christmas lunches taken away from them; and calls on the Liberal Council to acknowledge the public's feeling of disquiet and reinstate forthwith the £5 Christmas bonus which recognises, albeit in a modest

way, the contribution made by the over eighties to the life of the Borough today and in years gone by."
MP CONDEMNS DECISION TO AXE CHRISTMAS BONUS

The Early Day Motion was tabled by Gordon Prentice MP and supported by Peter Pike MP, Malcolm Chisholm MP, Estelle Morris MP, Paddy Tipping MP, Ken Eastham MP and others.

For Immediate Release. Number: 202/96. Wed 12 June 1996
CONGRATULATIONS AS ITHADD HITS THE JACKPOT

Local MP Gordon Prentice has hailed the news that Nelson based Ithaad has been awarded a massive £124,700 from the National Lottery.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "This is marvellous news. It is a very substantial sum indeed and I am sure it will make a tremendous difference."

For Immediate Release. Number: 203/96. Wed 12 June 1996

NHS DENTISTRY IN CRISIS says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has ridiculed this afternoon's Commons statement by Health Minister, Gerald Malone, that all is well with NHS dentistry. The Minister was announcing plans to introduce "rigorous prior approval for some courses of treatment" with new pilot schemes to ensure dental cover in areas of the country where NHS dentists are thin on the ground.

The Pendle MP angrily told the Minister the new proposals were fraudulent and that the so-called "localised problems of accessibility to NHS dentistry" were occurring all over the country. The MP cited the case of his own town, Barnoldswick, which has one NHS dentist with a long waiting list to provide cover for over 10,000 people.

Speaking afterwards, the MP commented: "The Minister painted a picture I simply do not recognise. NHS dentists are a dying breed in North East Lancashire. People have a right to NHS dental treatment and they are not getting it. The situation is nothing short of scandalous."

"The Minister asks us to put our faith in pilot schemes to provide extra cover. The acid test is whether local dentists who have de-registered with the NHS will rethink and take NHS patients on again."

"Who is to say that patients' costs will not go through the roof. The Consumers Association found that 40% of people who haven't been to the dentist in the past 18 months cited cost as the reason."

ends

Note to Editors: The number of people in Lancashire asking for help to find a dentist willing to treat them has soared over recent years. 1,851 patients sought help in 1992/3; 2,730 in 1993/4; and 4,357 in the period from April 94 to March 95.

NHS DENTISTRY IN CRISIS says MP

The NHS Executive reported last year that the North west has the worse dental
health in England, particularly in young children. 27 million patients are registered with a dentist (only 50% of the total population) Of these 21 million are adults and 6 million are children.

There are 18,000 dentists in England including 2,200 hospital and community health service staff who work as General Dental Practitioners. In 1979 the number of adults with no teeth was 28%, In 1991 it was 17%. In 1978 53% of the 16-24 age group had 18 or more sound teeth, by 1988, 83%. All children, and approximately 5 million adults - including those on income support, pregnant women and nursing mothers - are exempt from NHS charges.

Last year, DENPLAN, the private dental insurance scheme, had 540,000 subscribers (BUPA approximately 20,000). A maintenance scheme costs the average patient £12 a month or £144 a year and does not include any treatment for which a laboratory has to be used e.g. a crown (from £70 to £150) or a denture (approx £150). Total income from patients contributing towards NHS dental treatment totals £367 million (in 1993/94) of which £60 million is for check ups.

Note 2 to Editors: The Minister's statement (The Future of NHS Dentistry) included this paragraph (9) on “local problems”:

“Within a growing general dental service I recognise that there are some localised problems of accessibility. Health authorities are already able to apply to the Secretary of State to seek to appoint a salaried dentist and use the Community Dental Services in areas where availability problems arise. In addition we have been consulting within the NHS and the profession on an Access Fund for this year. We shall shortly be seeking bids from health authorities in England for individual grants in the region of £40,000, to enable them to fund local solutions to local problems of availability. An access scheme has

already been successfully launched in Wales. We shall monitor the outcome carefully."

Gerald Malone MP. 12 June 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 204/96. Thursday 13 June 1996

PRENTICE CHALLENGES MAYHEW ON SUSPECT FEED

The furore over BSE returned to the Commons this afternoon when Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew, that Britain had more than doubled its exports of animal feed potentially contaminated with the BSE agent after it had been banned in Britain. Tens of thousands of tonnes of this feed was exported after the 1988 UK ban.

Mr Prentice had been quizzing the Minister about the incidence of BSE in the Northern Ireland herd. The MP wanted to know if the framework document which will map out the route for the lifting of the BSE ban by the European Union would make provision for the introduction of certified "free of BSE" herds. The incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland is very low.

The MP went on to condemn the export of contaminated feed which he described as "criminal". Sir Patrick - who is responsible for agriculture in the province - refused to comment on the MP's claims saying he had not read today's report in the science magazine Nature.

Speaking afterwards, the MP commented: "This latest revelation is deeply depressing. How on earth can we expect co-operation from other countries in the European Union when the Government allowed the export of feed whose use for cattle was banned here. The BSE problem is evolving from a major crisis into a catastrophe."

The Press Association quotes today an unnamed spokesman for the British Veterinary Association who says his organisation questioned the export of feed that was forbidden in Britain. "I remember posing the question was it moral to export a feed which was perceived to be a poisoned feed?", he said. "I was told that everyone knew about this and it was the 'buyer beware' syndrome."

For Immediate Release. Number: 205/96. Friday 14 June 1996

PHOTOCALL: TODAY. FRIDAY 14 JUNE AT 2.30pm

Gordon Prentice MP will be joining the Governors and staff at Higham C.E. Primary School at 2.30pm for the opening of their new school extension which will be performed by County Councillor Sheila Derwent.

Contact Head Teacher, Mrs J.A. Taylor, Higham Primary School, Higham Hall Road, Higham BB12 9EU.

For Immediate Release. Number: 206/96. Monday 17 June 1996

MP TO QUIZ TARMAC ON "CUDDLY IMAGE"

A clash between local MP, Gordon Prentice, and quarrying giant, Tarmac, is on the cards. The company, who want to reopen the disused cement works at Knotts Lane in Colne have invited the MP - along with others - to join them at a reception in the capital on 9 July called to mark the company's efforts to become "environmentally friendly".

Speaking at Westminster, the MP commented: "I received a glossy booklet from Tarmac's "Independent Advisory Panel" with lots of photographs and beguiling text telling me what a responsible attitude Tarmac takes towards the environment. They are cultivating a warm, cuddly image."

"Unfortunately, this does not square with what they plan to do in Colne by re-opening a cement works in the middle of a residential area. I have accepted the invitation and I shall be saying loud and clear we don't want Tarmac at the top of Knotts Lane. I shall be writing to the company beforehand saying I intend to make my views clear and I shall be asking the "advisory panel" what they think."

Note to Editors: The MP has said he will speak in support of the Knotts Lane residents if they wish him to do so at any public inquiry that may be called. (See Press Release No 192/96. 11 June 1996.

Note 2 to Editors: The following statement appears on page 1 of the Tarmac Booklet - Tarmac and the Environment. Report of the Independent Advisory Panel:

Group Environment Policy*
Tarmac is committed to achieving a world class performance in environmental practice and the development of solutions to improve the
built environment. The Croup has a responsibility for the impact of its operations on local communities and the natural environment. It is committed to minimising their effects, both on its own and in partnership

with others.
more follows:

MP TO QUIZ TARMAC ON “CUDDLY IMAGE”

Tarmac's approach is based on achieving and reporting continuous improvement in environmental performance; the independent Environmental Advisory Panel monitors progress.

The implementation of this policy will reflect the varying activities of the
company in specific industry sectors, including:

• Meeting all legal requirements, regulations and standards of the country of operation, and monitoring to ensure compliance.

• Endeavouring to minimise the environmental impact of operations, and reduce the effects of noise, dust, disturbance and inconvenience as far as practicable.

• Demonstrating efficient use of energy, water and raw materials, taking appropriate opportunities to minimise waste and to re-use or recycle.

• Working to improve the standards of the sectors in which the company operates, enhancing environmental awareness and commitment amongst staff through structured training, and encouraging the adoption of sound environmental principles amongst contractors, suppliers and customers alike.

• Responding positively to the environmental developments in each business area by review of such issues with the appropriate authorities, the local communities and other bodies.

• Reporting the key environmental impact of operations, the improvements achieved and targets for the future.

Policy adopted 1994, published in Annual Report 1994.

For Immediate Release. Number: 207/96.Wednesday 19 June 1996

MP CALLS FOR REVIEW OF COUNCIL DIRECTORS’ PERKS AS LIBERALS AXE XMAS BONUS FOR THE OVER 80s

Pendle Council's Chief Executive and other senior managers who were responsible for "strongly recommending" the axing of the traditional £5 Christmas Bonus - or Mayor's Fiver - for the Borough's over 80s should have their own perks put under the microscope by councillors says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Last week, in an unprecedented move, the Council's Chief Executive, Stephen Barnes, called on the MP to apologise for linking the scrapping of the Christmas Bonus for the over eighties with a long service awards party for council employees among whom were the Chief Executive who received a barbecue, painting and lawnmower and the Director of Development who came away with a mountain bike.

Speaking at Westminster after a week in which the issue dominated the local press, the MP commented: "I have told the Chief Executive I have absolutely no intention of apologising. The very idea is preposterous. In a letter the Chief Executive has sent to the Lancashire Evening Telegraph, he has bracketed himself with - in his own words - refuse collectors, drivers and joiners."

"I have pointed out the crucial difference in that he advises the council and puts forward the proposals for cuts. They don't. It was the Chief Executive who "strongly recommended" the axing of the Mayor's fiver for the over 80s at a time when he knew he would personally benefit from the long service scheme which is not under review!"

"As I said last week, in the current climate when there is even talk of axing the pensioners Christmas lunch I think it is wholly inappropriate for Council Taxpayers to be funding the purchase of a lawnmower and other goods for the man who is recommending the cuts." more follows:

...MP CALLS FOR REVIEW OF COUNCIL DIRECTORS' PERKS AS LIBERALS AXE XMAS BONUS FOR THE OVER 80s

"Many people must feel as I do that a long service award to a "refuse collector, driver or joiner" is a very different kettle of fish when compared to the kind of awards we have seen given, at Council taxpayers' expense, to the Council's Chief Executive on £45,000."

"The whole thing is crying out for review."

For Immediate Release. Number: 208/96. Tuesday 18 June 1996

MANUFACTURING "BACK IN RECESSION" says MP

Manufacturing industry is back in recession as output and investment fell in the last two quarters, says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, whose Pendle constituency has close to 50% of the workforce employed in manufacturing, says manufacturing employment fell by 28,000 in the first three months of this year. Total manufacturing investment last year was below the 1979 level in real terms.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "On the 9th of July the government will publish its Summer Economic Forecast and the Chancellor has now admitted he will have to revise down his 3% growth forecast for 1996 which he made in the November 1995 budget."

"The public finances remain in a perilous position with the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) for 1995/96 at £32 billion - an astonishing £10 billion higher than Kenneth Clarke originally forecast."

"The Government keeps hoping the feelgood factor will return and lift our spirits. Yet these figures point to an underlying malaise that 17 years of Conservative Government has not cured."

Note to Editors: Latest figures show the output of the economy (Gross Domestic Product) 2% higher than a year earlier, for 1995 as a whole growth was 2.5% compared to 4% in 1994 and the 3.25% forecast in the November 1994 budget.

Over the period 1979-95 the economy grew at an average annual rate of only 1.9%, slower than in any 16 year period prior to 1979.

The average growth in the U.K over 1979-95 has been the slowest of the G7 and any major EU country, this period has included the two worst recessions for the UK since the war.

For Immediate Release. Number: 209/96. Tuesday 18 June 1996

PENDLE MP DRILLS HOME THE MESSAGE OF "THE TOWN WITH NO NHS DENTIST"

Pendle MP and Barlick resident, Gordon Prentice, slammed Health Minister, Gerald Malone, in the Commons today for engineering a crisis in NHS dentistry.

The MP told the Minister that talk of improvement would come as cold comfort to the 10,000 people living in Barnoldswick who do not have access to an NHS dentist. He called the Government's latest measures a "complete sham" and the whole package "fraudulent".

Speaking at Westminster after the Commons clash the MP said: "It beggars belief that after 17 years of Conservative Government Ministers can hold it out as some kind of triumph that a town as big and as important as Barnoldswick should be without NHS dental cover. The situation is outrageous."

"The Conservatives are pushing dentistry into the private sector. More and more people are finding it difficult to get a dentist who will treat them on the NHS."

ends

Note to Editors: The British Dental Association has reported that 1 in 3 people nationally can't find an NHS dentist. A million people have been taken off NHS dentists lists since 1992.

For Immediate Release. Number: 210/96. Tuesday 18 May 1996

TORY GOVERNMENT UNRAVELLING says MP

The Tory Government is unravelling before the nation's eyes according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking earlier today at Westminster, the MP said: "There comes a point in the lifetime of any government when the smell of decay sets in. There is a point of no return which the Tories have now passed. It is a government unravelling before our eyes."

"Just look at the events of the last week. First we had the fiasco of Euro-sceptic funding which demonstrated beyond doubt that the present-day Tories are in fact two parties within a party. Both are organising warchests, to fight the internal battle for the soul of the Tory Party."

"Then we had the Edgeware Hospital saga, with two Tory back-benchers holding the government to ransom. Give us our own way or else we resign the Whip. The two MPs were only adapting the government's own tactics in Europe. Consider the events of yesterday alone. In the House of Lords, Tory peers could not be persuaded to vote for the unwieldy, expensive, bureaucratic system of nursery vouchers. They voted to defeat their own government, in spite of all the warnings and cajolings of the Tory whips about the embarrassment this would cause."

"Yes, we want nursery education for all four year-olds. No, we do not want an ideologically-driven voucher system, which would leave

thousands of parents without access to the facilities which they desperately need."

The MP concluded: "The government of John Major is falling apart. We must, at every opportunity, help it on its way. The country has had a bellyful of the Tories."

For Immediate Release. Number: 211/96.Thursday 20 June 1996

"MAYOR'S FIVER" ROW BOILS OVER AT WESTMINSTER

The war of words over the "Mayor's Fiver" - the traditional £5 Christmas Bonus to the Borough's over eighties - has intensified following the tabling of a Commons motion yesterday by the Liberal Democrat local government spokesperson and Newbury MP, David Rendel, which denounces local MP Gordon Prentice. Pendle Council meets tonight to ratify the decision.

David Rendel's Commons motion backs the local Liberals for scrapping the old folks' Christmas Bonus and criticises Mr Prentice for allegedly attacking long serving town hall staff.

Now Halifax MP, Alice Mahon, has tabled an amendment to Rendel's motion which appears in the Commons Order paper today defending Pendle's MP and calling on Pendle Council to reinstate the Christmas Bonus for the Borough's over eighties and to drop the threat to axe the Borough's Christmas lunch for pensioners. She also slams the Liberals for threatening town hall staff who express public concern about the cuts.

The MP at the centre of the controversy acknowledged the stir he had created: "At the end of the day I want to see the Mayor's Fiver reinstated. The over eighties have been shabbily treated by the Liberals. I also want to lay to rest the idea that I have it in for town hall employees getting recognition for long service. However, I draw the line at the most senior officers of the council who "strongly recommend" cuts affecting the elderly and plead the Borough's poverty as the reason."

Note to Editors: The Early Day Motion by Liberal MP, David Rendel and the amendment proposed by Alice Mahon MP follows:

The Conduct of the Honourable Member for Pendle
(proposed by David Rendel MP)

This House deplores the criticisms made by the Honourable Member for Pendle of a presentation of long-service awards to staff of Pendle Borough Council by the

“MAYOR’S FIVER” ROW BOILS OVER AT WESTMINSTER

Labour Mayor; congratulates Liberal Democrat controlled Pendle Borough Council on its enlightened employment policies which include long-service awards for staff who have given 25 years public service and notes that the present policy was recently agreed with the full support of the Labour opposition; notes that similar policies are being pursued by the Labour controlled Councils of Burnley, Rossendale and Blackburn (in Burnley's case at considerably greater expense); recognises that the revenue budget of Pendle Council has been capped at approximately the same level for the past five years and congratulates the Council on its efficient financial management and radical and forward looking restructuring which has allowed it to avoid any cuts in service to this point; approves the actions of this forward-looking authority in already taking early and prudent steps, entirely openly and in the full glare of public debate, to deal with the expected further shortfall of £800,000 in its revenue budget for 1997-98; notes that no other Council in Lancashire, including those controlled by the Labour Party, hands out £5 to its over-80s at Christmas and that this unique practice can unfortunately no longer be afforded at a time when essential services are now at risk from Government enforced cut-backs.

The Conduct of the Honourable Member for Pendle
(Amendment proposed by Alice Mahon MP)

delete from House to end in line 3 and insert:

congratulates the Hon Member for Pendle on drawing public attention to the behaviour of Pendle Borough Council; recognises the deep feeling of unease in Pendle about the presentation of a barbecue, painting and lawnmower to the Chief Executive paid for by council taxpayers at a time when he was recommending the axing of the £5 Christmas Bonus to the Borough's over eighties; notes that the Chief Executive in a letter to the Lancashire Evening Telegraph sought to justify his awards by bracketing himself with long serving refuse collectors, drivers and joiners - employees who have no responsibility for drawing up or recommending spending cuts and with whose awards the public would have no quarrel; believes furthermore that the Liberal Democrat controlled Council should review its employment policies in the light of the recent report in the Lancashire Evening

Telegraph quoting veteran Liberal Councillor, Tony Greaves, saying that steps would be taken to prevent Pendle Council employees campaigning against the proposals put forward by the elected leadership of the council saying he was "fairly concerned" about staff telling the public to protest over the planned closure of the Tourist Information Centre in Nelson Town Hall and that he would not tolerate agitation against the council; recognises that in common with local authorities all over the country the revenue budget of Pendle Council is inadequate to meet the Borough's needs and that a strict ordering of priorities is required; considers the Christmas Bonus for the over eighties should take precedence over gifts paid for by council tax payers to the council's chief officer on £45,000 a year and believes the bonus should be reinstated by the council when it meets on 20 June and that the threat to axe the Borough's Christmas lunch for pensioners should be lifted.

For Immediate Release. Number: 212/96.Wednesday 19 June 1996

MP SEES CASTLES IN THE AIR

Thousands of people across the country are being denied access to castles and ancient monuments and other jewels of the nation's built heritage because admission prices are pitched too high says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. With summer on us, this is a very real issue, he says.

The MP says English Heritage ticket prices can often range between £3 and £5 for an adult and, even with concessions for the under 16s, a family trip out can blow a hole in the family budget.

The MP, who quizzed Heritage Minister, Ian Sproat, commented: "There are concessions for senior citizens and unemployed people as well as the under 16s but that leaves millions of people who are in low paid work and those who, for example, rely on family credit to make ends meet. For people on low incomes, the castles might as well be in the air for all the chance they have of getting in. The ticket price is as much an obstacle as the drawbridge of old."

"People should not be priced out of enjoying and learning from our heritage. In Lancashire and in Yorkshire there is so much to see but it costs an arm and a leg."

Note to Editors: The Heritage Secretary told the Pendle MP yesterday today that English Heritage generated £7.5 million from ticket sales at their Historic Properties in 1995-96. They also generated £3.5 million from their membership scheme and a further £4.7 million from retail and catering activities. The total visitor and membership income of

£15.7 million represents over 30% of English Heritage's total running costs of £50.9 million in 1995-96 and over 50% of the costs of running and maintaining their 407 Historic Properties.

For Immediate Release. Number: 213/96. Wed 19 June 1996

PRENTICE TELLS ENERGY MINISTER "ELECTRICITY AND WATER DON'T MIX"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, put the Government on the spot in the Commons this afternoon when he challenged Energy Minister, Tim Eggar, to say whether he agreed with failed Tory leadership contender and right wing standard bearer, John Redwood, that electricity and water company mergers should be discouraged.

The MP, dubbing Redwood "the Prince across the water", asked the Minister if he agreed with his colleague who said in the Times on 1 June that British Utilities had become the adventure playground of the corporate finance industry."

Speaking at Westminster after the Commons exchange, Prentice observed: "The Minister refused to be drawn and it is as plain as a pike-staff there is an enormous gulf between the two wings of the Conservative Party on this issue. The Government's competition policy has been unclear in recent years with piecemeal decisions and no guiding principles set down to make the policy intelligible. Not my words but those of the vulcan - John Redwood."

"It is a complete shambles and it all started in the North West. The Government's refusal to refer the first merger - North West Water and Norweb - to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has sown chaos and confusion throughout the industry."

For Immediate Release. Number: 214/96. Thursday 20 June 1996

GOVERNMENT LIVING ON BORROWED TIME says MP

The Government is afloat on a sea of debt says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was commenting on this week's Government borrowing (PSBR) figures released by the Treasury which show a PSBR deficit of £3.2 billion for May 1996.

At £31.9 billion the PSBR for 1995-96 was £10 billion higher then forecast in the November 1994 budget. The MP said: "These woeful figures illustrate the dreadful state of the public finances and the continuing weakness in the economy. The disappointing retail sales

figures show that people are hanging on to their money rather than spending it. So much for the feel-good factor."

"Who can possibly believe Chancellor's claim that public borrowing is on a downward trend and under control? In fact, the underlying trend of public borrowing, excluding all the receipts from the privatisation sell-offs, is now running ahead of last year's appalling performance. It is no wonder the Government is selling off everything that isn't nailed down. Everything is going under the hammer."

Note to Editors: Excluding privatisation money, the PSBR deficit in May was £4.3 billion, worse than the total of £4.1 billion in May last year. The Net Public Sector Debt now stands at over £300 billion despite tax increases since 1992 that will have cost a typical family £2,000 by the next general election. (Source: Financial Statement Budget Report 1996/97)

Before the 1992 election the Government predicted that the PSBR for 1996-97 would be only £6 billion. (Source: Pre- election budget statement) City commentators now expect it to be above £26 billion. Interest payments on the National Debt were £21.4 billion in 1994-95. The interest payments in 1994-95 were equal to £816 for every person paying income tax. (i.e. £21.4 billion and 26.2 million people paying income tax.) (Source: Financial Statistics ONS)

For Immediate Release. Number: 215/96. Wed 19 June 1996

LABOUR OFFERS HELPING HAND TO GIVE NURSERY PLACES TO EVERY THREE AND FOUR YEAR OLD

Shadow Education Secretary, David Blunkett, has offered a bipartisan approach to Gillian Shephard to offer a nursery place to every four year old - but without recourse to the controversial voucher scheme. The offer comes in the wake of Monday's Government defeat in the Lords which stops the expansion of the scheme nationwide early next year. It is currently being piloted in four education authorities.

David Blunkett commented: "We will ask Local Education Authorities to co-ordinate local development plans in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors, setting targets to ensure that every three and four year old has access to a high quality nursery place."

David Blunkett explained that extending the vouchers scheme nationally would cause mayhem: "We don't want to pick up mayhem next year. Unless Mrs Shephard takes up our offer, we will rally every

Tory dissident to defeat the Government if they try to reverse the Lords vote in the Commons."

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, added: "The voucher scheme is worse than useless. What's the point in having a voucher if it cannot be redeemed? In parts of the Borough - and in West Craven especially - getting a nursery place is like winning the lottery."

"If Labour forms the next Government, I give a cast iron guarantee there will be nursery places in Pendle for all three and four year olds."

For Immediate Release. Number: 216/96. Thursday 20 June 1996

GOVERNMENT PROMISES TO BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO DEAD TOWN CENTRES

The Government this afternoon held out the prospect of a revival of town centres as Environment Secretary, John Gummer, unveiled new planning guidelines designed to encourage shops, leisure and entertainment businesses and other organisations back into the heart of deserted and run down towns and cites. His statement was hailed as a Pauline conversion by sceptical Labour MPs.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, taunted the Minister for a policy U turn which, he said, had come years too late. The MP told the Commons that Government policies had crucified his own town, Barnoldswick, where in recent years the Job Centre had closed along with the Electricity and Gas showrooms and any number of small retail shops in the centre.

The MP told Gummer: "It s not just the inner cities that have been turned into deserts by the policies of this Government. Businesses in lots of small and medium sized towns have been crippled through swinging increases in business rates - now the responsibility of central and not local government."

"I welcome the fact that the Minister has put the brakes on out of town developments but he has a long learning curve. Our towns have been struggling for years and a wasteland has been created in inner urban areas throughout the UK."

"Our cities and towns should be vibrant and alive and prosperous - and safe to be in."

For Immediate Release. Number: 217/96. Thursday 20 June 1996

BELT AND BRACES CHECKS ESSENTIAL IF EUROPE IS TO LIFT BEEF BAN says PENDLE MP

A belt and braces policy of action designed to eradicate BSE is absolutely essential if the European Union is to be persuaded to lift the beef ban according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

In the Commons this afternoon, the MP told Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, that confidence in the UK's efforts to end the epidemic was at an all time low. The MP reminded Rifkind the ban on contaminated feed - the ruminant protein feed - had come in as long ago as July 1988 but it was not policed properly. A total ban on the use of the feed was introduced only on 4 April this year.

Minutes before the Minister left the Commons to jet to Italy for the Florence summit, the Pendle MP told him the Government had been criminally negligent in allowing contaminated feed to enter the system long after its ban in 1988. "That's why the Commission is insisting on independent checks and double checks. They simply don't believe our own Government can be trusted to police the new arrangements."

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "John Major has now conceded the slaughter of another 67,000 cattle in a last ditch effort to persuade European leaders to lift the ban on British beef exports. His right hand man, Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, interviewed this morning on Radio 4's Today programme, tried to play down the mass slaughter saying "We are talking about a handful of cattle." For Heseltine to describe the new slaughter policy as a marginal increase involving a 'handful' of cows is preposterous and misleading. His remarks will outrage dairy farmers who, like the rest of us, hold the Government responsible for this appalling catastrophe."

For Immediate Release. Number: 218/96. Monday 24 June 1996

MP CALLS FOR HONESTY IN BARLICK POLITICS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has made a call for honesty in Barlick politics which, he says, is being polluted by a stream of Liberal misinformation.

Speaking to Labour Party supporters in West Craven at the weekend, the MP said: "The continuing controversy over Barlick's Tourist Information Centre and the threat to the town's fire cover illustrates the point perfectly. The Liberals say the closure of the TIC is the furthest thing from their mind and, in any event, the proposal came from council officers. Yet a few days later, the local Liberals are issuing

blistering condemnations of Labour County Councillors for threatening the town's fire cover when the Liberals know the proposal is being floated in a consultative document prepared on the basis of central government's fire cover guidelines by the Chief Fire Officer - not the elected county councillors."

"I shall be telling the Chief Fire Officer I do not want any changes to the town's fire cover and I know that in this I shall be joined by people of all political parties and none. The consultation runs until August."

"So why are the local Liberals fanning the flames by inventing this story that Labour is prepared to see lives put at risk by changes in fire cover? Why on earth do our local Liberals behave in this way? I want to see more honest politics in the town."

Note to Editors:

"The Labour County Council are suggesting that we could do without one of our fire engines... Labour and the Tories are being strangely quiet about it. Is it because it's being put forward by the Labour-controlled County Council?"
Liberal Focus Leaflet "A Decade of Action"
Published by David Whipp June 1996

more follows

MP CALLS FOR HONESTY IN BARLICK POLITICS

"I am forwarding a copy of my report (on standards of fire cover) on the recently completed review of fire risk categorisation within Lancashire. The report outlines both options for change and a number of recommendations regarding the type and scale of fire cover provided within the County and is being issued as a consultative document prior to the matter being formally considered by the Fire Authority... I would emphasise that no decisions have yet been made in respect of any items contained in the report. I have sought to indicate to the Authority the need for improvement of cover in some areas, enhancement of existing provision in some others and have outlined some areas where an option for reduction in existing cover is apparent."
Letter from the Chief Fire Officer, J.G. Russel, to Gordon Prentice MP
13 June 1996

"Pendle Officers have proposed closing down the Tourist Information Centre in the town to save money - but the Liberals have rejected this."
Barnoldswick Focus June 1996. Published by David Whipp

"Saying the Liberals wanted to close down the Barnoldswick Tourist Information service is just a blatant party political lie."
Focus Craven Ward By election special. June 1996
published by David Whipp

"The Office is not giving terribly good value for money."
Councillor Tony Greaves
Lancashire Evening Telegraph 22 May 1996

"Remember, these proposals (to axe the Mayor's Fiver to the over eighties and close the Tourist Information Centre) come from council officers who must look at all possible ways of cutting costs. It is then up to the administration - the elected councillors - to decide what to do with the proposals, hopefully in consultation with all concerned."
Craven Herald Editorial (West Craven Topics)
14 June 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 219/96. Monday 24 June 1996

MP TACKLES RAILTRACK OVER MISSING RAIL FENCE

The missing fencing along the railway line between Lomeshaye Road bridge in Nelson and Brierfield which was highlighted last week by Nelson Councillor, Cyril Hughes, must be repaired as a matter of urgency says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP commented: "Councillor Hughes drew attention to this peril back in March when he wrote to Railtrack. He heard from them a month later - on 28th April - saying the matter was in hand yet still nothing happened. It is simply not good enough."

"I am planning to meet the regional representatives of Railtrack to discuss a number of issues of concern and the slovenly way in which they handled Councillor Hughes call for action will be at the top of my list."

"What does it take to get Railtrack moving?"

For Immediate Release. Number: 220/96. Tuesday 25 June 1996

PRENTICE BACKS CAMPAIGN TO SAVE WHALES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a campaign in parliament to press the International Whaling Commission to implement a minimum 50 year ban on commercial whaling and embark on a programme of research on population recovery, monitoring and encouragement of 'Green Tourism' such as Whale Watching. The International Whaling Commission which regulates whaling is meeting in Aberdeen this week.

The Commons motion supported by the MP calls for the IWC to take into account global warming, ozone depletion, over-fishing pollution and other environmental threats that whales and dolphins face apart from whaling.

The MP said: “I know from my postbag - and especially from my younger constituents - that people feel very concerned about the threat to the whale. It is a marvellous, gentle creature and it has enormous symbolic status. If we are prepared to see the whale hunted to extinction then what hope for the rest of the planet?”

“It is crucially important that the conservation of all 80 species of whales and dolphins, some of which are under serious threat, should be taken into account by the lWC. It is unforgivable that Norway and Japan continue to catch whales, most of them under the bogus excuse of 'scientific research'. I want Britain to press for the extension of the present moratorium for at least 50 years to allow the whale population to recover.”

Note to Editors: The International Whaling Commission meeting started yesterday, on Monday 22nd June, in Aberdeen and lasts for one week.

For Immediate Release. Number: 221/96. Tuesday 25 June 1996

LABOUR UNVEILS PLANS TO GET PEOPLE BACK TO WORK

The Labour Party has unveiled plans to get people back into work and local MP, Gordon Prentice, says the changes can’t come soon enough.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: “Helping more people to move easily from benefit back into work will be the centrepiece of Labour's social security reforms in government.”

“Far too many people in the country as a whole and here in Pendle are trapped in dependency” said the MP. “Seventeen years of Tory government have seen the numbers of people dependent on benefits soar, from one in twelve of the population to one in six. It is small

wonder there has been an explosion in the social security budget as a result. The way to get the cost
down, and to help unemployed people at the same time, is to help them get back into work."

"That's precisely what Labour is proposing. The DSS should be about getting people jobs, not just paying out benefits. We're proposing that the DSS and Employment Services should come together to offer a streamlined and seamless service; that the advice given should be tailored to the individual needs of the individual; that personal career plans should be developed; and that there should be more flexible use of existing benefit money, to help people with the search for employment."

"This approach requires a revolution in the way the DSS operates. A Labour Government will bring about that fundamental change."

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 222/96. Tuesday 25 June 1996

MP MARKS DOWN PLAN TO BRING BACK THE 11 PLUS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has given poor marks to the Government's plans to bring back the 11-plus and sink secondary modern schools.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "The Conservatives are prepared to abandon the vast majority of our children to mediocre secondary modern schools for the sake of creating grammar schools for a few."

"The effect of the scheme will be to give a lower standard of secondary education to nineteen out of every twenty youngsters. Existing comprehensives will become more like the old secondary moderns, with lower standards as a result."

"Every new Tory grammar school will create at least four Tory secondary modern schools."

"Lancashire Education Authority will be looking at school admissions in Pendle afresh in the Autumn and no one pretends the present system is perfect. But does anyone seriously believe a return to the eleven plus is the answer. Who in their right mind wants to see the return of a system which branded thousands and thousands of youngsters as failures at the age of eleven. That is no answer."

For Immediate Release. Number: 223/96. Tuesday 25 June 1996

MP's PLEA FALLS ON DEAF EARS

The plea to local Liberals for honesty in Barlick politics has fallen on deaf ears. On Monday, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said political discourse in the town was being polluted by a steady stream of Liberal misinformation.

The MP was reacting at Westminster to the news that personalised letters have tonight gone out to voters across the town claiming a vote for Labour in Thursday's by elections will give a green light to Lancashire County Council to take away one of the town's two fire engines.

The MP commented: "What on earth do you do with these people? It is pure distortion of the facts to suggest to people that voting Labour in a by election to Pendle Council will encourage the County to axe one of the town's fire engines. The proposals on fire cover across Lancashire come from the Chief Fire Officer as he made explicitly clear in his letter to me on 13 June. The Barnoldswick Liberals have no shame."

Note to Editors: The personalised letter sent to voters on 25 June reads: "Did you know that on 23 May 1996 the Labour run Fire Service and Public Protection Committee agreed to the plan for a fire engine to be taken away from Barnoldswick to be sent out for public consultation. Taking one of our two fire engines away will make it less safe for people in Barnoldswick. It will put lives at risk. Voting Labour in the Council by election will give a green light to the Labour controlled authority that it is OK to take our fire engine away. Many Labour supporters have said they cannot vote for such a move. It is a chance they will not take. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter."

"The Labour County Council are suggesting that we could do without one of our fire engines... Labour and the Tories are being strangely quiet about it. Is it because it's being put forward by the Labour-controlled County Council?"
Liberal Focus Leaflet "A Decade of Action"
Published by David Whipp June 1996

"I am forwarding a copy of my report (on standards of fire cover) on the recently completed review of fire risk categorisation within Lancashire. The report
more follows:

MP's PLEA FALLS ON DEAF EARS

outlines both options for change and a number of recommendations regarding the type and scale of fire cover provided within the County and is being issued as a consultative document prior to the matter being formally considered by the Fire Authority...”

“I would emphasise that no decisions have yet been made in respect of any items contained in the report. I have sought to indicate to the Authority the need for improvement of cover in some areas, enhancement of existing provision in some others and have outlined some areas where an option for reduction in existing cover is apparent."
Letter from the Chief Fire Officer, J.G. Russel, to Gordon Prentice MP
13 June 1996

For Immediate Release. Number: 224/96.Wednesday 26 June 1996

PHOTOCALL: LOCAL MPs STEP OUT WITH THE RAMBLERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and Burnley MP, Peter Pike, will be stepping out with local ramblers on Saturday, 29th June at 1.30pm from the bus terminus, Trawden.

The walk takes place the day before Family Rambling Day (Sunday) when MPs from all parties join ramblers around the country to enjoy a summer’s day out.

ends

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP, who is a member of the Commons Agriculture Select Committee, is a keen campaigner for improved access to the countryside while protecting the legitimate rights of those who live and work there. Last September he joined Shadow Environment Secretary, Frank Dobson MP, and President of the Ramblers Association, Janet Street-Porter at a rally at Penistone Hill Country Park near Haworth to promote "Open Britain Day". He joined others in calling for greater public access to moorland and open country.

Trawden lies at the foot of the massive Boulsworth Hill. In the 1950s there was not even a footpath over a four and a half mile length of moorland at Boulsworth Hill. All footpaths ended at the foot of the moor. There was a public inquiry on 20 and 21 March 1956 and the public were told they could gaze at Boulsworth Hill from the road. When the Inquiry Report went to the Minister he ordered the County Council to establish a footpath along the top of the hill. There was plenty of resistance from landowners and it took another twenty two

years for a three mile long U shaped permissive (ie no legal right of access) path to the summit to be agreed.

For Immediate Release. Number: 225/96.Wednesday 26 June 1996

NUCLEAR FAULTS POSE PROBLEMS FOR SELL-OFF

On the day on which the price and final details of the British Energy float are published, six of the eight stations due to be privatised are being investigated by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate because they have developed problems.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who has been an arch critic of nuclear privatisation, commented: "The problems may mean that the reactors cannot continue to be run at full load, reducing power output and the income that is crucial to the long term profitability of the industry."

The MP added: "The Government has today announced that the proceeds from this sale will be in the range of £1.26bn to £1.96bn. This is the merest fraction of the value that the taxpayer has spent building the power stations. Sizewell B alone cost £3bn and was only opened in March!"

"There is also the very real fear that a significant amount of British Energy's £14bn liabilities will rebound onto the taxpayer because details are now emerging that the Segregated Fund - set up to reassure the public on this very point - only covers approximately £4bn of these liabilities."

"Taxpayers are being short-changed on a massive scale. This is a desperate dash for cash to raise funds for election tax cuts, but the real danger is that the British taxpayer will be left to pick up the tab for years to come."

"The railways were sold for a song. The army's housing stock is being sold for a pittance and then leased back for a fortune. And now the nations nuclear power stations are being virtually given away. What will anyone give me for this Government?"

For Immediate Release. Number: 226/96.Wednesday 26 June 1996

MP APPALLED BY JOB LOSSES AT LOMESHAYE

The loss of 120 jobs at Mitre Printing at Lomeshaye came as a bolt from the blue says local MP Gordon Prentice.

Last Friday, the parent company, Bass, announced the works would close in October following a "review of printing requirements". The MP was told these could be met more cost effectively and efficiently elsewhere.

The MP commented: "I am in touch with the company to see if there is any way things can be turned around. I want to know where the company wants the printing to be done in future and details of the alleged advantages of the other location."

"With the recent relaxation of gaming laws and the introduction of the national lottery I was led to believe companies like Mitre had a rosy future. I am waiting to hear from the company. Clearly, there are lots of questions that need answers."

For Immediate Release. Number: 227/96. Thursday 27 June 1996

PHOTOCALL: MP GETS HIS DAILY BREAD

129 Scotland Road at 11.30am on Friday 28 June

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting local baker, W.H. Oddie, at the bakery at 129 Scotland Road, Nelson on Friday 28 June at 11.30am.

The MP will be seeing how the cakes are made and will be discussing with Bill Oddie issues of concern to the trade such as loss leader bread pricing by supermarkets.

For Immediate Release. Number: 228/96.Friday 28 June 1996

LIB DEMS HOLD BARLICK COUNCIL SEATS

Yesterday's by elections in Barnoldswick, triggered by the resignations for health reasons of the two sitting Liberal councillors, were held by the Lib Dems last night.

In a reduced turnout - down in Craven from 35% in May to 29% yesterday and in Coates from 45% to 44% - the Liberal Democrats beat off a challenge from Labour's Jim Skinner in Coates and Bert Lewis in Craven.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, last night paid tribute to the Labour Party candidates. The MP said: "Naturally, we are all very disappointed indeed that the local Council will not be getting the benefit of two outstanding local candidates. But we live to fight another day."

"My thanks go all the Barlick people who turned out to vote Labour yesterday. And to those who didn't vote Labour or didn't vote at all

then, clearly, we in the Labour Party have to work harder to get our message across. The appalling decision of the Pendle Liberals to axe the "Mayor's Fiver" for the over eighties and to which we were determined to hold the Liberals to account was, in the event, eclipsed by an invented scare story about the town's fire engines - with a Liberal inspired parallel poll using fluorescent orange ballot boxes placed directly outside the polling stations."

"The fire engine story comes up year after year but it still has very great potency with all the talk of lives being placed in peril. I plan to meet the Chief Fire Officer shortly to discuss his report in detail with him."

Note to Editors: Craven vote: Labour 210 (17.9%); Con 185 (15.7%) Lib Dem 778 (66.3%). Coates vote: Labour 555 (32.7%); Con 323 (19%) and Lib Dem 819 (48.2%).

For Immediate Release. Number: 229/96. Monday 1 July 1996

LEGAL AID "NO HELP AT ALL" FOR MILLIONS says MP

The Legal Aid system is of no practical use for millions of people on very limited income says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. In the Commons this afternoon, the MP lashed the Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Department, Gary Streeter MP, for a policy which puts access to the law out of reach of millions. The Government is expected to publish a White Paper on Legal Aid tomorrow (Tuesday).

The MP said: "Every week I get a steady stream of people coming to see me at my surgeries unable to get legal aid because they are not absolutely on the bread line. The upper income limit above which there is no help at all is only £7,403 a year."

"The percentage of households which are eligible for legal aid (but who must contribute towards some of the legal costs) has gone down from 77% in 1979 to 47% today. The percentage of households where legal aid picks up the entire bill has dropped from 28% in 1979 to somewhere between 20% and 25% today."

"The Lord Chancellor repeatedly states that the Legal Aid scheme is helping more and more people. This is true, but they are drawn from an increasingly narrow section of society. Legal Aid eligibility levels are now pegged to Income Support eligibility levels, making the scheme accessible only to the very poor. Millions of working people, whose taxes fund the Legal Aid scheme, receive nothing in return from it and are denied access to justice by Britain's high legal services costs."

“The main reason for the soaring cost of Legal Aid is the Government's own legislation, such as the Police and Criminal Evidence Act l984 and the Children Act 1989. The Government failed completely to account of the cost implications.
more follows:

LEGAL AID “NO HELP AT ALL” FOR MILLIONS says MP

“Poorer people are also being forced to take legal advice because of the national crisis in areas such as employment, housing and social security.”

“They look to the law for help and it is not there.”

Note to Editors: Last year the Government abolished the Lord Chancellor's Legal Aid Advisory Committee which was established in 1949 by the same Labour Government that founded the Legal Aid scheme. The primary purpose of the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949 was to assist those of "small or moderate means" to get access to justice. Labour is still committed to honouring that principle.

At levels of income below the upper income limit for help, (£7,403) £2,498 is deducted from the person’s disposable income with the resultant sum divided by 36. This is the sum payable each month as the person’s contribution to her/his legal costs.

For Immediate Release. Number: 230/96. Monday 1 July 1996

RAIL FARES RIP-OFF CONDEMNED BY PENDLE MP

Tonight's Panorama unveils the results of the Consumer's Association's latest survey which shows that out of 116 ticket inquiries, 101 responses were incorrect and overpriced - an error rate of 87 percent. The new survey shows that train companies have ignored warnings that they would be fined if they continued to breach the rules.

Shadow Transport Secretary, Claire Short MP commented: “Labour's warnings about the consequences of this privatisation are coming home to roost. Commercial gain has overtaken public service in this fragmented system. A Labour Government will ensure that the regulator uses his powers to promote higher standards and pursue the public interest.”

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, added: “These revelations from the Consumer Association bear out my own experience. Fares seem to be creeping up all over the place. The regulator needs to crack down on the privatised rail operators who are hoodwinking the travelling public. The train operators should be subject to heavy fines if they consistently overcharge or misinform passengers about cheaper ticket options.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 231/96. Monday 1 July 1996

LABOUR PLEDGES CASH BOOST FOR NHS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says Labour’s plans for the NHS will pump millions into extra patient care at the expense of the bloated bureaucracy that has been created by the Conservatives. Speaking earlier today at Westminster he pledged: “Labour will cut NHS waiting times and give patients more choice of when and where they are treated by getting rid of the Tory internal market and making deep cuts, year on year, in the swollen £1.5 billion cost of extra bureaucracy.”

The Party’s Health spokeswoman, Harriet Harman, said: We will end the system of extra contractual referrals and cut back on trust and health authority management costs. Cutting bureaucracy will transform services. 100,000 patients could be treated and taken off the waiting lists by the savings we propose.”

Note to Editors: The Government has failed the NHS on

- Waiting times: Over 1 million people are waiting for treatment by the NHS. 250,000 wait over six months. And yet the Secretary of State for Health has now given hospitals the go-ahead to increase waiting times. Across the country waiting times are lengthening - for example, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority has announced that maximum waiting times will rise from 12 months to 18 months.
- Bureaucracy: There are 20,000 more managers in the NHS and 50,000 fewer nurses than there were in 1989. More people to count the cost of care and fewer to provide it. £1.5bn extra is now wasted every year on administering the Tory internal market in the NHS. Administration costs have increased from 8.8% to 11.9% of NHS expenditure between 1988/89 and 1994/95. The Government say they are putting more money into the NHS each year. But it's not just how much money they're putting in - it's what they're spending it on.
- Extra contractual referrals: are one of the most costly and bureaucratic examples of the Tory market madness in the NHS. Patients can only be referred to hospitals where their GP (if the GP is a fundholder) or Health Authority (if their GP is a non-fundholder) has a

contract. Otherwise they have to get approval for an extra-contractual referral. Labour will end the system of extra-contractual referrals and restore freedom of referrals to all GPs.

For Immediate Release. Number: 232/96.Wednesday 3 July 1996

MP BACKS "ROAD TO THE MANIFESTO"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says the Labour Party's "Road to the Manifesto" document, published tomorrow (Thursday), points the way to a new Labour Government. It will bring honest politics to the centre stage says the MP.

Speaking at Westminster after the weekly meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the MP said: "The Road to the Manifesto contains our flagship policies - around 140 specific pledges a Labour Government will deliver. We do not intend to break our promises to the British people as the Conservatives have done. Today's meeting of the PLP was right behind the Leader of the Party."

"It is fair to say that the past few days on the road to the manifesto have been a bit rocky with the announcements on the Scottish and Welsh devolution and to pretend otherwise would be absurd. But things are now settling down. Tomorrow, with the publication of the document itself - the coping stone will be put in place and, along with my Parliamentary colleagues from constituencies all around the country, I shall be calling a meeting of all Party members in Pendle to discuss the Road to the Manifesto and its policy priorities. I want to get everyone's backing and commitment to the programme it sets out."

"The Road to the Manifesto is a serious and honest endeavour to be straight with the British people about what a Labour Government will - and will not - do in office. By contrast, the Conservatives' spoof Labour Manifesto has blown up in their faces. I have now seen a copy of their spoof which is puerile and juvenile in equal measure. "

The MP added: "At this year's Annual Conference I shall be nominating Tony Blair for Leader of the Party - as I did last year. Blair has all the makings of an outstanding Prime Minister."

Note to Editors:
The Tories latest attack on Labour has been a complete failure. Here is what the press had to say today about the Tory spoof manifesto:

"John Major moved last night to save the Tories' latest campaign against New

Labour from collapsing into an embarrassing sick joke."
The Sun

"No laughing matter. Lame jokes take the steam out of attack on Labour. The Tories' anti-Labour offensive stalled on the launch-pad yesterday amid accusations of bad taste and lame jokes."
Daily Mail

"Bad jokes backfire in Tories' sick spoof" Daily Mirror

"Spoof manifesto backfires on the Tories" Guardian

"Tories Two Ronnies raise few laughs" Daily Telegraph

"The attempt at humour caters to an acquired taste" Financial Times

"Foolish stunt is the sign of a desperate party" Times

"Never mind New Labour, New Danger. The real problem is ... Same Old Tories, Same Old Claptrap"
The Sun

For Immediate Release. Number: 233/96.Wednesday 3 July 1996

MP CALLS FOR CASHPOINT VIGILANCE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has demanded reassurances from the authorities at the House of Commons that the cashpoints in the Palace of Westminster are safe and secure.

The MP took the unusual step of quizzing Michael Martin MP, the senior Labour MP who chairs the House of Commons administration committee, after reports that a Tory MP's researcher admitted he broke into a Commons cashpoint.

The Pendle MP said: “The person who tried to prise the top of the Cashpoint I use at the Commons is either a knave or a fool. There are more policemen and policewomen per square yard here at Westminster than anywhere else in the land!”

Press reports say a 26-year-old man tried to lever the top off a Barclays' machine when trying to retrieve his cashcard causing £1,300-worth of damage.

In a Commons written answer Mr Martin told the Pendle MP: “I consider that the current security arrangements for the cash

dispensing machines are entirely satisfactory. Cash machines have been in the Palace since 1990 and there had only been one incident where a machine was damaged. The individual responsible was easily identified and action is being taken by the police and House authorities."

For Immediate Release. Number: 234/96. Wednesday 3 July 1996

PENDLE MP WELCOMES TV CONCESSION FOR CARAVAN OWNERS

Caravan owners will not have to pay for two TV licences in future - but only if the caravan is not a "fixed abode". The concession was given to caravan owners in yesterday's debate on the Broadcasting Bill following furious lobbying by the Caravan Club and others.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, welcomed the move. Speaking at Westminster today, he said: "The law on TV licences is in a real mess in lots of ways but this at least clears up one anomaly."

"There are lots of people in Pendle who have caravans and the thought of forking out another £89.50p had smoke coming out of their ears. Clearly, they can't watch two televisions at two separate locations at the same time! I think this is a sensible and welcome concession."

"However, I have to say I am very disappointed the Government has not moved on the vexed question of TV licences in sheltered accommodation. At present people in sheltered housing pay a concessionary £5 fee but only if there is a warden living on the premises, so to speak. This anomaly creates a lot of bad feeling and really ought to be addressed. We really need a review of the whole system to iron out these glaring anomalies."

Note to Editors: In the Broadcasting Bill's committee stage, the Government made one important concession over TV licences for the elderly living in sheltered flats. At present, elderly people who live in council sheltered flat pay a concessionary £5 TV licence fee but if one person exercises their right to buy they automatically disqualify their neighbours. In future where just a small number of residents had bought their own home, this would not disqualify other residents.

For Immediate Release. Number: 235/96.Thursday 4 July 1996

MP PUSHES FOR GREATER COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Access to the countryside should be a priority of an incoming Labour Government says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP claims access has been dramatically eroded under the Conservatives.

The MP was speaking at Westminster last night as the Agriculture Select Committee launched an investigation into Government schemes which pay farmers for following environmentally friendly land management practices and for encouraging access to the countryside. The MP said: “The land is our common inheritance. In a very real sense, it belongs to all of us.”

The MP added: “In Pendle we don’t do so badly but, across the UK as a whole, the situation concerning access is pretty bleak at present. Clearly, we must work with farmers and other landowners to open up the countryside. People who live in towns don’t carry anthrax. So long as people are responsible and sensible - as 99.9% of them are - then farmers have nothing to be afraid of.”

“Large tracts of former Water Authority land has now been privatised, and traditional access restricted in some cases. Former Forestry Commission woodlands equivalent to an area the size of the Isle of Wight have been sold off with a loss of public access. Use of public funds through such schemes as the Countryside Stewardship scheme to promote new access have been poorly publicised. The introduction of Aggravated Trespass in the Criminal Justice Act has implications for innocent walkers and users of the countryside. Promises to implement the findings of the Common Land Forum, including access, have been broken.”

The MP continued: “Labour has long been committed to a legal 'Right to Roam' but we want to take people with us. The air is thick with misinformation. No-one will have the right to trample over crops!” More follows:

MP PUSHES FOR GREATER COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Note to Editors: Labour strongly supports the recent Concordat agreed by the Scottish Access Forum with all the main Landowning and Countryside groups as a basis for any right to roam legislation based on the following principles;

•Freedom of Access exercised with responsibility and subject to reasonable restraints for management and conservation purposes.

•Acceptance by visitors of the needs of land management, and understanding of how this sustains the livelihood, culture, and community interests of those who live and work in the hills;

•Acceptance by land managers of the public's expectation of having access to the hills.

•Acknowledgement of a common interest in the natural beauty and special qualities of uplands, and the need to work together for their protection and enhancement.

•Right to Roam will only apply to access on foot. It will apply to open areas of mountain moorland and existing common land. Areas that come under this definition will be identified by marking on maps and signposted wherever possible. Private homes and gardens, working areas like farmyards and growing crops will not be included. We do not seek to put undue burdens on landowners. Support will be given in way marking, carparks, footpath construction and maintenance and carparks, including related field features like drystone walls wherever appropriate. We will consult on the need for countryside wardens, both voluntary and professional to ensure guidance and advice is given.

Labour accepts that a freedom to roam on open country should be linked with responsibilities to care for the country and respect farming, landowning, shooting and nature conservation interests. We will introduce a 'duty of care' which will place an obligation on all those who use the countryside to respect the Country Code and the needs of a working landscape. There will be special provision for recognised nature reserves and Sites of Special Scientific interest wherever appropriate.

The Labour Party is committed to sensible and workable legislation and will consult with all interested groups to seek consensus as to how the legislation should be framed before any Bill is introduced. Consultation has already taken, or is scheduled to take place with a range of countryside, recreation and conservation groups including the Ramblers Association, The Country Landowners Association, NFU, Friends of the Earth, RSPB and the Moorlands Association.

Apart from our commitment to Right to Roam on Uplands and Common Land, Labour will protect existing rights of access to such areas as Forestry Commission land and we will seek to increase access by voluntary agreement with owners on farmland, private woodlands, riverbanks, cliffs, foreshore wherever appropriate.

For Immediate Release. Number: 236/96. Monday 8 July 1996

MP RAISES RAIL SAFETY CONCERNS WITH MINISTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing Transport Minister, John Watts, to look again at railway safety following recent disclosures in the local press which showed alarming gaps in fencing along the tracks. The MP is to meet Railtrack shortly to review the situation in Pendle and elsewhere in the North West.

The MP commented: "There are new draft regulations in the pipeline which, I hope, will tighten up existing rules which are plainly inadequate. In 1994/5 - the last year for which figures are available - the Minister told me there were 128 fatal accidents on the railway involving adults and 6 involving children. In the same year there were 52 serious injuries involving adults and 9 involving children. Over the past 16 years there have been 2,363 fatalities on the railway and 1,012 serious injuries. And these figures exclude suicides and attempted suicides. Clearly, the railway is a very dangerous place to be."

ends

Note to Editors: The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate's accident statistics are not recorded by county.

The Pendle MP asked the Secretary of State for Transport, what legislative provisions regulate physical access to the permanent way; and what responsibilities Railtrack has to protect the public by ensuring the railway is adequately fenced and how many miles of unfenced railway line run through urban areas. The Minister, John Watts, replied: "Under Section 16 of the Railway Regulation Act 1840, Section 23 of the Regulation of railways Act 1868, Section 55 of the British Transport Commission Act 1949 and railway bye-laws, it is an offence to trespass on the railway.

"Railtrack has a statutory duty under Section 10 of the Railways Regulation Act 1842 and Section 68 of the Railways Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 to ensure that fencing is provided and maintained for its railway lines. In certain limited cases, lines may be exempt from the requirement for fencing
by the terms of the old private Act or the Light Railway Order which originally authorised their construction. However, I understand that in some of these cases fencing is in fact provided even though the Act or Order does not require it.

“Following a review of existing railway safety legislation, the Health and Safety Commission has consulted on new draft regulations, including one which would require infrastructure controllers, so far as is reasonably practicable, to prevent unauthorised access by persons or animals which could endanger health or safety.

“Railtrack is also subject to the same duties and liabilities in respect of persons on its premises as any other public limited company. These duties include the general requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, including the duty to conduct the undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons are not exposed to risks to their health or safety.

Accident tables follow separately.

For Immediate Release. Number: 237/96. Friday 5 July 1996

MP’s PAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be voting against the big increase in MP’s pay which has been recommended by the Top Salaries Review Body.

The Commons will vote next Wednesday on the controversial recommendation to boost MPs pay to £43,000 a year.

The MP said: “This enormous increase cannot be justified. I shall be voting against and if the recommendation of the Top Salaries Review Body is carried by the Commons I shall not be taking the pay increase. Having voted against the increase, I could not, in all conscience, take the money.”

The MP added: “MPs should no longer have to decide their own salaries. There has to be a better system.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 238/96. Thursday 11 July 1996

MP HAILS MANDELA VISIT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed the state visit to the UK by Nelson Mandela who spoke this morning to peers and MPs in the historic Westminster Hall at the Palace of Westminster.

The Pendle MP, who met Nelson Mandela at Westminster on an earlier visit, said: “The ceremony today was an entirely fitting and appropriate - giving recognition of one of the greatest individuals of the twentieth

century. He was denounced in his youth as a rebel. Then he was dubbed a terrorist. He brought peaceful change to his country and now he is the President of South Africa and an icon for a new generation."

The MP added: "He told us he wanted peace, prosperity and friendship. It was a great privilege to be there today."

For Immediate Release. Number: 239/96. Monday 8 July 1996

MP CALLS FOR HIGH SPEED TRAINS ON "NEGLECTED" WEST COAST MAIN LINE

The West Coast Main Line linking the North West with London and the South East should have state of the art high speed trains running on it according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking in the Commons as the Office of Rail Franchising was preparing to open up the bidding for a company to run train services on the line. The Franchising Director, Roger Salmon, wants prospective bidders for the West Coast Main Line Franchise to register bids by this Friday, 12 July.

In an angry outburst in the Commons this afternoon, the Pendle MP told Transport Minister, John Watts, that the neglect of the line was a national disgrace. The MP pressed the Minister on details of the amount of public money that had been spent modernising and upgrading the rolling stock and railway infrastructure on the West Coast Main line and its sister on the East Coast over the past decade.

The Minister said electrification of the East Coast Line had been completed in 1991 at a cost to public funds of £515m. The work in the 1960s and 70s on the West Coast Line cost just over £200m. The entire 10,000 mile network of track and stations - now in the ownership of Railtrack - was privatised earlier this year for under £2billion.

The Pendle MP accused the Government of spending millions modernising the East Coast Main Line before "gifting" train operations on it to an American Company - Sea Containers - while allowing the West Coast line to decay with "ancient rolling stock pulled by puffing billies". Speaking afterwards the Pendle MP said: "Money should have been spent upgrading the WCML years ago. It is a vital artery which is now sclerotic."

For Immediate Release. Number: 240/96.Wednesday 10 July 1996

GIVE SMALL BUSINESSES A BREAK says PRENTICE

Small business are being crushed by the burden of business rates says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the evidence of failed businesses is

all around us in the shape of boarded up shops and a proliferation of "for sale" signs.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "Prospects for our small businesses will improve when the economy lifts out of the doldrums and people feel confident enough about the future to spend money. In the meantime we need to look at ways of lifting the burden on struggling small businesses."

"Rate relief is possible but from what I can gather it seems the legislation is not particularly widely used by local authorities - much to the annoyance of the associations representing small businesses. In any event, local authorities must look at each application on its merits."

"I am in touch with my own local council here in Pendle to see what more, if anything, it can do to help."

Note to Editors: Councils have powers to give hardship relief to mitigate the impact of the business rates. Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 enables local authorities to reduce or remit rates for any ratepayer, including businesses, where two conditions are satisfied: •would the ratepayer sustain hardship if relief was not given? •is it reasonable to give relief, taking into account the interests of local taxpayers? (75% of the cost of giving relief is met by the Government, but the other 25% must be met locally).

The Environment Secretary John Gummer announced in the local government finance statement on 30 November 1995 that local authorities' contribution to hardship relief would not in future count towards their capping totals. This means that authorities spending at their capping limits will not have to divert funds from other spending commitments in order to give relief; the change was intended to encourage them to give more relief where businesses face difficulties. The Government has proposed Rate Relief for Village Shops which would give mandatory 50% rates relief for certain general stores and post offices in villages. Authorities would be free to top up the relief given on a discretionary basis.

For Immediate Release. Number: 241/96. Thursday 11 July 1996

MP WANTS MORE DETAILS ON MITRE CLOSURE

The Managing Director of Gala Clubs, Ian Payne, has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, there is no alternative to the closure of Mitre Printing in Nelson this October with the loss of 120 jobs. Mr Payne has overall responsibility for Mitre's operations.

The MP said: “The closure news came as a bombshell. The parent company is Bass the brewers and I am told there is nothing that can be done to turn things round. However, I am still at a loss to know why the breakthrough into profitability did not take place after all the investment which was put into the Nelson operation. I am pressing for more answers.”

“I believe there are only three specialist bingo ticket printing companies in the entire country and I clearly want to know what they have that Mitre doesn’t. Unfortunately, I have yet to see detailed financial information about Mitre Printing - a company which has been dormant for years.”

Note to Editors: The letter from Mr Payne to The MP reads as follows: “Dear Mr. Prentice, I refer to your letter of 24th June 1996 (received on 1st July 1996) requesting further clarification of our intention to close Mitre Printing.

I am sure that you will appreciate that decisions of this nature are not taken lightly. Every possible alternative was explored before the closure announcement was made. Since 1993 a significant amount of capital and management effort has been put into the business, but Mitre was not successful in increasing the level of sales needed to provide an adequate return on that investment. Additionally, Mitre operates in a market that has over capacity, which cause inevitable pressure on margins and profitability.

It was against this background that we made our decision. It is not a reflection on the commitment or abilities of the team at Mitre, but more about the marketplace in which Mitre operates. There are a number of specialist bingo ticket producers whom we believe can more effectively meet our future requirements. I very much regret having to declare the team at Mitre redundant, but every effort is being made to assist them in finding alternative employment. Since the announcement we have been working closely on site with an Out placement company who provide a counselling service and job search workshops. I understand that this action is already producing results.

For Immediate Release. Number: 242/96. Monday 8 July 1996

PENDLE MP BACKS SHADOW CABINET ELECTIONS

Press speculation that this year’s Shadow Cabinet elections could be scrapped has been ridiculed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The Parliamentary Labour Party is due to ratify the timetable for the annual elections held in October at its meeting on 17 July.

The MP observed: “The Press is full of speculation that the elections will be torpedoed but the press comment is wide of the mark. Elections are part and parcel of the democratic process. They should never be scrapped as a convenience. There is no conceivable justification for abandoning the Shadow Cabinet elections which are written into the standing orders of the PLP. I am sure they will go ahead in the usual way.”

“No-one has given me any justification for scrapping them other than they might be destabilising so close to a General Election. But elections are the warp and the weft of democracy. The PLP in its wisdom has, year after year, always returned a full complement of experienced, competent and hard hitting Shadow Cabinet members.”

“Labour Members of Parliament are supremely well qualified to judge the competence of those who speak for the Party from the Shadow Cabinet.”

“Labour MPs see each other at close quarters day after day in the Chamber, in Committee and at 1,001 meetings of one kind or another. The suggestion that this year the PLP is in some way uniquely unqualified to make a sober judgment and vote on the relative strengths of the candidates is patently absurd.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 243/96. Tuesday 9 July 1996

CHANCELLOR GETS HIS SUMS WRONG says PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has demanded an explanation from the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the “black hole” in public finances. Last Sunday Kenneth Clarke admitted his "boffins got their estimates wrong". (Breakfast with Frost 7 July 1996).

The Pendle MP commented: "It is not good enough for the Chancellor to blame his mistakes on his so-called 'boffins'. It is his responsibility to come clean and admit how large the black hole in the public finances really is, why he has allowed it to occur and how he proposes to rectify his failure.”

"With borrowing running ahead of forecasts time after time, slower growth and tax revenues falling short, the Chancellor must be called to account. Kenneth Clarke must tell us how much his "mistake" on tax revenue cost and why VAT payments are down. He must explain the corporate tax revenue shortfall and tell us how much is being lost as a result of more widespread tax avoidance. We need to know the impact

of slower than expected growth on the public finances. In other words, how much of the shortfalls in revenue and overshoots in borrowing are cyclical rather than structural? And he must tell us the true cost of the beef crisis."

"The Chancellor has made an enormous £12.5 billion mistake in his Budget forecast for borrowing. This is the Chancellor who can't make 2 + 2 add up to 4."

"We need an independent audit of the public finances. No-one believes his sums any more."

For Immediate Release. Number: 244/96. Tuesday 9 July 1996

TARMAC BOSSES PROMISE TO LOOK AGAIN AT KNOTTS LANE CONTROVERSY

The quarrying and building materials giant, Tarmac, is to look again at the the proposed re-opening of the concrete batching plant at the top of Knotts Lane in Colne. Local people - who have the support of the area's MP, Gordon Prentice - are dead against the move saying it will blight the entire area.

Earlier this evening the MP buttonholed the company's Group Chief Executive, Neville Simms, and its chairman, Sir John Banham, at a meeting called by Tarmac to publicise its "environmentally friendly" outlook.

The MP said: "Tarmac's boss, Neville Simms, looked me in the eye as he pledged to look personally at the Knotts Lane issue. I will be sending him all the information he requires and I will be pressing for a fundamental rethink by the company. He said he would look at the issue in detail and I am hopeful something will come of it."

Last month, the MP ridiculed the company's promotional literature saying the glossy booklet about environmentally friendly policies didn't square with the company's intentions for Colne in his constituency. He said at the time: "I received a glossy booklet from Tarmac's "Independent Advisory Panel" with lots of photographs and beguiling text telling me what a responsible attitude Tarmac takes towards the environment. They are cultivating a warm, cuddly image. But this does not square with what they plan to do in Colne by re-opening a cement works in the middle of a residential area."

Note to Editors: The MP has said he will speak in support of the Knotts Lane residents if they wish him to do so at any public inquiry that may be called. (See Press Release No 192/96. 11 June 1996).

For Immediate Release. Number: 245/96. Wednesday 10 July 96

MP SEEKS ASSURANCES OVER BARLICK'S FIRE ENGINE

Rampant speculation over the fate of Barnoldswick's fire engines should be laid to rest as soon as decently possible says the town's MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims the issue is unearthed by the town's Liberal Democrats every year - generally around the time of the local elections. The MP is meeting the County Fire Chief, Mr Russel on 19 July to get all the details "from the horse's mouth".

The Fire Chief wrote to the Pendle MP on 13 June to say he was consulting widely on the fire cover standards to be applied across the County. He made no specific recommendations but indicated where he believed fire cover was more than adequate and where it was insufficient.

The MP said: "I want to see fire cover maintained in Barnoldswick, let there be no doubt about that. But I also want to hear the Chief Fire Officer explain and justify any changes he may be minded to recommend to the elected members of the Fire Authority after the consultation period finishes at the end of August. Rumours are half way round the world before truth has got its boots on."

Earlier this week, the MP asked Home Office Minister, Tom Sackville, how much discretion fire authorities have to vary fire cover between districts and towns in their areas. The Minister told the MP: "The deployment of fire service resources within a brigade area is a matter for the relevant fire authority in the light of its statutory responsibilities under the Fire Services Act 1947. Under section 19 of the Act the authority may not, however, reduce the number of fire stations, fire appliances or firefighting posts in a particular area without the consent of the Home Secretary."

ends

Note to Editors: Extract from letter from Chief Fire Officer to the Pendle MP. "I am forwarding a copy of my report (on standards of fire cover) on the recently
completed review of fire risk categorisation within Lancashire. The report outlines both options for change and a number of recommendations regarding the type and scale of fire cover provided

within the County and is being issued as a consultative document prior to the matter being formally considered by the Fire Authority... I would emphasise that no decisions have yet been made in respect of any items contained in the report. I have sought to indicate to the Authority the need for improvement of cover in some areas, enhancement of existing provision in some others and have outlined some areas where an option for reduction in existing cover is apparent."
Letter from the Chief Fire Officer, J.G. Russel, to Gordon Prentice MP
13 June 1996

EMBARGOED Friday 12 July 1996. Number: 246/96.

PENDLE HAS FOURTH WORST YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN UK says MP

Shock statistics showing Pendle has the fourth worst record in the entire country for youth unemployment have been released by the area's MP, Gordon Prentice.

The figures show that over a third of the people unemployed and claiming benefit in Pendle in April this year were under 25. These represented 33.4% of the total number out of work that month (2,281). In the entire UK only Aberavon (34.6%), Manchester Gorton (34.4%) and Bradford West (34%) were higher.

The area's MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This is a truly shocking state of affairs when so many of our young people are destined for the dole. The Government has created a lost generation."

The figures show that at least a quarter of those unemployed are aged between 18-25 in 381 of the UK's parliamentary constituencies.

The shock figures provide a backdrop to the launch today of Labour's new youth manifesto - which will be the subject of consultation with young people and business. It pledges that every 18 year old will reach a minimum of level 2 core qualifications (equal to 5 GCSE A-C grades). This will replace the £500 million Youth Training programme, which Government adviser Sir Ron Dearing has dubbed a failure.

Every young person under 25 out of work for over six months will have the option of work in the private or voluntary sectors, full-time education to achieve qualifications or a place on a new environmental task force, linked to Labour's citizens service plans.

The new figures, from the House of Commons library, show that young people make up a quarter of those out of work in 381 constituencies in the UK - and over a third in four constituencies: Aberavon, Manchester Gorton, Bradford West and Pendle.

Constituencies where at least one in four out of work is under 25 include the Conservative Party Chairman's Peterborough seat (31.1% of the jobless, 1,329 young people out of work), which Dr Mawhinney has abandoned on his "chicken run" to secure a safer seat elsewhere.

There are 250,000 young people aged 18-25 out of work for over six months.

In Scotland, young people make up at least a quarter of the jobless in 58 constituencies while the same is true of two Northern Ireland constituencies. The Scottish constituency with the highest proportion is Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (32.8%, 736). The Northern Ireland constituency with the highest proportion is Belfast South (32.2%, 1,576).

For Immediate Release. Number: 247/96. Tuesday 16 July 1996

MP DUBS NORTH WEST WATER "A TAX FREE ZONE"

"North West Water has made £1,518,000,000 profit and paid out £560,000,000 in dividends to shareholders since privatisation. Yet they have been virtually a tax free zone" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "North West Water has made £1.5 billion profit since privatisation and paid out £560 million in dividends to its shareholders since privatisation. Yet according to the
published figures, North West Water has paid no mainstream Corporation Tax since privatisation. It is an absolute disgrace."

The Pendle MP continued: "That's because when they privatised the industry, Tory Ministers gave North West Water £1.1 billion in special tax allowances. On top of that, they were given a £1,055,000,000 debt write-off and a £330 million 'green dowry' to ease the path to the private sector."

"People in Pendle and elsewhere in the North West know the company has been rolling in profits. But most people don't know they have also been a tax-free zone. I think most people here in Pendle will want to see that put right. That's why North West Water will not be allowed to worm their way out of paying their fair share of Labour's windfall tax to help provide jobs and training for young people who have neither."

“I shall be seeing the boss of North West Water, Sir Desmond Pitcher, later today at our regular meeting of Labour MPs from the North West.”

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP is Vice Chair of the North West Group of Labour MPs.

Since privatisation, the ten privatised water companies have made almost £10 billion profits. They have paid out over £3 billion in dividends to shareholders. But they have managed to avoid paying virtually any mainstream Corporation Tax at all. In some cases, far from ~paying tax, the water and sewerage company's capital allowances has been used to further offset the tax liability of the parent company. As a result, they have been virtually a tax-free zone.

HOW HAVE THEY AVOIDED PAYING TAX?

The reason why the water companies have been able to get away with paying no mainstream Corporation Tax is because, when they privatised the water industry, Tory Ministers gave the industry a staggering £7.7 billion worth of special tax allowances on the capital invested when the industry was. publicly owned to set against future Corporation Tax liabilities. This was on top of £5 billion worth of debt write-offs and a £1.5 billion green dowry'. All in all, the privatised water industry was handed £14.2 billion of taxpayers' money.

The figures for mainstream Corporation Tax paid by the water and sewerage companies cover the period from 1990/91 to 1994/95. These tax figures on the core businesses are not yet available for 1995/96. Companies may have paid advance Corporation Tax but that can be offset against later tax liabilities. Some companies have used core business tax allowances to reduce the tax paid by the parent companies.

SCANDALOUS PROFITS OF THE PRIVATISED UTILITIES

Given this £14.2 billion, it's not surprising that the water companies are so rolling in profits that they are up to their necks in takeovers and talk of share buy-backs.

These levels of profits and dividends prove that the water companies can easily afford a windfall tax. That is why they will not be allowed to worm their way out of paying their fair share of Labour's windfall tax to help provide, jobs and training for young people who have neither.

For Immediate Release. Number: 248/96. Monday 15 July 1996

PENDLE MP WELCOMES GOVERNMENT GRANT TO MONITOR AIR QUALITY IN CLITHEROE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the Government's cash grant of £147,200 to Ribble Valley Council to monitor air quality in and around Clitheroe where the controversial burning of Cemfuel by Castle Cement has dominated the local headlines for years.

The MP, whose constituency of Pendle is next door to Ribble Valley, said the news of the grant will do much to reassure Ribble Valley people. "Ribble Valley Council will now have the money and the resources to monitor air quality in the area" he said.

The MP, who chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee, said: "Systematic air monitoring is absolutely essential if people's fears about what they are breathing are to be properly addressed. This is good news. We can all breathe a sigh of relief."

Note to Editors: Last month, the Government published its long awaited response to the report of the Environment Select Committee on the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns. The key conclusion is the Government's insistence that the fuel is safe and can be burnt without harming in any way human or animal health.

The Government recognises there are outstanding problems at the Clitheroe plant - most notably concerning plume-grounding - but says these matters are the subject of an appeal by Castle Cement and will be considered in a public hearing.

The Pendle MP has championed the cause of greater openness and transparency on matters concerning the use of secondary liquid fuels such as cemfuel. He secured a debate on the issue in the Commons earlier this year.

For Immediate Release. Number: 249/96. Tuesday 16 July 1996

CLARKE'S SUMMER FORECAST "GLOOMY AND OVERCAST" says PENDLE MP

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clarke, has made ten admissions of failure according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster in advance of the Commons debate on the

economy this Wednesday and in the wake of the publication of the Chancellor's "Summer Forecast" on the performance of the economy.

The Pendle MP commented: "The Government's borrowing has soared out of control. The forecast for the PSBR this year is now £27 billion - it has been revised upwards four times from the £13 billion in the November 1994. The 1997-98 PSBR is now forecast at £23 billion - up from £15 billion just eight months ago. Since the Budget the Chancellor has been forced to admit a £12.5 billion error in his forecast for this year and next!"

"His errors in calculating borrowing now total an astonishing £65 billion. The Summer Economic Forecast confirms that by next year, the Government will have borrowed over £65 billion more, since 1992, than they said they would at the time of the last election."

"The Government's growth forecast has been cut. One reason for the weak public finances is slow growth. The Chancellor has been forced to admit his Budget forecast of 3% growth for this year was too optimistic and has revised it down to 2.5%."

"Tax receipts are weak. A second reason for weak public finances is abnormally low tax receipts. The Summer Economic Forecast admits that the 1995-96 general government receipts were £7.5 billion lower than forecast in the 1995 Summer Economic Forecast. But the Chancellor cannot tell us why tax receipts are down or what he intends to do about it."

"The Chancellor has broken promises on the current deficit. In the November 1993 Budget, Kenneth Clarke said: The budget... should eliminate borrowing to finance current spending by 1997-8. Yet the Summer Economic Forecast predicts that there will be a £15 billion public sector current deficit in 1997-98. Throughout this economic cycle, the government has borrowed not to invest - which makes sense - but to to fund current expenditure. It is like a family borrowing to do the shopping!"

"The National Debt has doubled. Since March 1990, gross national debt has doubled from £190 to £380 billion, reported in the Summer Economic Forecast, despite privatisation receipts of £38 billion and north sea oil revenue of £10.5 billion over this period."

"Overall investment is very depressed. Growth is low because investment is depressed. Last year's Summer Economic Forecast predicted a 3% rise in overall investment in 1995. Now the Chancellor

has been forced to admit that total investment failed to grow at all last year."

"Business investment is lower. The November 1994 budget forecast an increase in business investment of 10.75% in 1995 whereas the outturn has been just 1.5% Every year, the government predicts a recovery in investment which fails to materialise."

"The trade deficit is deteriorating. The Summer Economic Forecast predicts that the trade deficit will rise from £11.5 billion in 1995 to £13.5 billion this year."

"Finally, employment growth is weak. Last week's Summer Economic Forecast admits that "Rising employment accounts for very little of the fall in unemployment..." The Government's failure to tackle unemployment and economic inactivity explains why we are paying the bills of economic failure rather than investing for success.

This Government has comprehensively failed the nation. Zero out of ten."

For Immediate Release. Number: 250/96. Tuesday 16 July 1996

MP REVEALS "GERIATRIC TRAINS" ON THE WEST COAST MAIN LINE

Seasoned rail traveller, Pendle MP Gordon Prentice, is still seething about the poor service between the North West and London and the South on the infamous West Coast Main Line. The MP clashed last week in the Commons with Transport Minister John Watts about the state of the line.

Now he says the locomotives and rolling stock are "geriatric" and no match for the newer trains on the East Coast Main Line which eat up the miles in no time, cutting journey times from London to York to under two hours. The MP says Preston to London deserves the same standard of service.

Mr Prentice discovered just how ancient the rolling stock is after again quizzing Transport Minister, John Watts.

The MP said: "The engines on the West Coast Line should be in a museum - not struggling to pull ancient heavy coaches along a deteriorating track. No fewer than 18 are 30 years old! Another 35 are over 20 years old and only 15 have been built since 1987. No wonder they keep breaking down. Compare this with the East Coast where, before the recent privatisation of Railtrack, public money was invested

to produce a gold plate service. 31 locomotives were built after 1988 and 22 between 1976 and 1982."

"When it comes to the coaches, where the hapless passengers sit, the position is even more stark. Compare the East Coast - where 283 comfortable coaches were built between 1989 and 1992 - with the West Coast where 138 were built between 1973-75 and 249 between 1975-79."

"The case for more investment on this key route is absolutely unanswerable. It has been allowed to go to rack and ruin. Why on earth should people in the North West have to put up with such a state of affairs?"
more follows:

MP SLAMS "GERIATRIC TRAINS"

Note to Editors: Last week the Office of Rail Franchising opened up the bidding for a company to run train services on the WCML. The Franchising Director, Roger Salmon, wanted bids registered by Friday, 12 July.

Electrification of the East Coast Line had been completed in 1991 at a cost to public funds of £515m. The work in the 1960s and 70s on the West Coast Line cost just over £200m. The entire 10,000 mile network of track and stations - now in the ownership of Railtrack - was privatised earlier this year for under £2billion.

Yesterday (15 July) the Pendle MP asked the Minister for details of the average age of (a) the locomotives and (b) the passenger rolling stock on the East Coast and West Coast main lines. The Minister, John Watts, replied: "Precise figures would only be available at disproportionate cost. I have set out in the table below details of the build dates of locomotives and passenger roiling-stock on the East Coast and West Coast Main lines:

EAST COAST MAIN LINE

Locomotives
31 Class 91s built between 1988 and 1991
22 Class 43 HST Power Cars built 1976-82

Coaches
283 Mark IV coaches for electric services built 1989-1992
76 Mark III HST trailer cars built 1976-82

WEST COAST MAIN LINE

Locomotives
18 Class 86s built 1965-66
35 Class 87s built 1973-75
15 Class 90s built 1987-90
7 Class HST Power Cars built 1976-1982

Coaches
138 Mark II built 1973-75
249 Mark III bult 1975-79
38 Mark III built 1985
20 Mark III HST Trailer Cars built 1976--82

For Immediate Release. Number: 251/96.Tuesday 16 July 1996

SAVE THE DOORSTEP PINTA says MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called for government action to support
the doorstep delivery service.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: “It is high time this Government stopped damaging the milk doorstep service. Many people, including the elderly and the ill, find it difficult to get to the shops. They rely on the doorstep delivery service.”

“The doorstep delivery service is in decline. Thousands of jobs have been lost. In November 1994 the Tories deregulated the milk industry, raising the price of milk and adding to the problems of the doorstep delivery service. In July last year they introduced a new £35 annual tax on electric milk floats. Labour opposed deregulation of the milk industry and voted against the new tax on milk floats.”

The MP added: “We want to see money from the Common Agricultural Policy used to support the doorstep delivery service. The European milk regime costs over £3,373 million a year. Some of this money helps to subsidise school milk, but most of it is spent wastefully.”

“Labour has launched a national petition in support of the doorstep delivery service. It is supported by the National Dairymen's Association and the National Pensioners Convention. If we do not show support for our doorstep delivery service now, in a few years time we may well find it has disappeared from many local streets and housing estates altogether. That would be bad for consumers and jobs.”

“Like the Post Office and the railways, the doorstep delivery service should not be left to the free market.”

more follows:

SAVE THE DOORSTEP PINTA

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP is a member of the Commons Agriculture Select Committee.

The doorstep delivery service

• Millions of households have their milk delivered to the doorstep. Many people including the elderly and ill, find it difficult to get to the shops and rely on doorstep delivery.

• The doorstep delivery service is in decline, with a fall in England and Wales of almost one-third in the number of people employed in the industry over the last five years. In Scotland the decline has been almost one-third over the last seven years.

Conservative policy

• The Conservatives deregulated the milk industry in November 1994. As long as we have European milk quotas for our dairy farmers there cannot be a free market in milk. Combined with quotas, deregulation has pushed up prices, destroyed jobs and added to the problems of the doorstep delivery service.

• Dairy Crest, Northern Foods and Unigate have announced big job losses and blamed them on government policy. Britain is a net importer of dairy products.

• The Tories imposed a £35 annual tax on every electric milk float from July 1995. There are about 25,000 milk rounds in England and Wales, most of which use electric milk floats.

Labour Policy

• Labour opposed deregulation and voted against the milk float tax.

• The CAP milk regime costs £3,373 million across Europe. £373 million of this money is used to subsidise skimmed milk powder to be fed to calves! Some of that CAP money should be redirected to support the doorstep delivery service.

• In line with the new EU packaging directive, support for the doorstep delivery service could take the form of a subsidy on the environmentally friendly re-usable glass milk bottle.

• Supported by representatives of the dairy industry and pensioners associations, Shadow Agriculture Minister, Gavin Strang, has launched a national petition in support of the doorstep delivery service.

• Like the Post Office and the railways, the doorstep delivery service should not be left to the free market.

For Immediate Release. Number: 252/96. Tuesday 23 July 1996

MP SLAMS SALE OF ARMY HOMES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has condemned the Government's plans to sell off the armed forces married quarters estate. He says the sale of 59,000 family homes is driven by the need to deliver tax cuts in the run up to the General Election. Speaking at Westminster as the proposal cleared the Lords at the second attempt, the MP said: “This privatisation is probably the most short-sighted yet. It is designed purely for the short-term benefit of the Treasury, which will get an estimated £1.6 billion.”

“The scheme makes no economic sense as the Government will continue to be responsible for repairs, maintenance and management of the estate. It will also have to pay a large annual rent bill to the private owners in order to rent back the houses it previously owned.”

“The concerns of the armed forces' families have been ignored. We could see the break-up of the estate communities and huge rent increases.”

The MP added: “I am totally opposed to this scheme which represents such poor value for taxpayers' money. Assets are being sold at rock-bottom prices for short-term gain.”

Note to Editors: By advocating this scheme the Prime Minister has broken his Election Manifesto promise to service families that he would "improve the quality and management of service housing." Opposition to the Government's proposals has been widespread, sparking a backbench rebellion of over sixty Conservative MPs. The Royal British Legion has criticised the Government for demonstrating "ignorance of Service peoples' real needs."

For Immediate Release. Number: 253/96.Wednesday 24 July 1996

MP SLATES "CASH FOR INFLUENCE" CLUB

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has condemned the "cash for influence" club run by the Conservative Party. The Guardian reports this morning that John Beckwith the director of the Premier club has secured $1bn backing from a US insurance company AIG to buy Britain's social security offices. John Beckwith's company is also on the shortlist to buy the MoD married quarters estate in a "give-away" deal.

The Premier club has been advising potential members on ways to conceal the £100,000 political donation in company accounts as entertainment. This is illegal. The Premier club sells access to ministers and the Prime Minister to business people in exchange for large donations to the Conservative party. Despite this being absolutely clear from conversations between the Observer journalist and Mrs Prenn the club secretary John Major continued to insist at Prime Minister's questions yesterday: "No-one can buy access to ministers; no-one is promised favours." John Major is the Patron of the Premier club. Brian Mawhinney is President.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "It is an absolute scandal that a businessman, John Beckwith, who is shortlisted to obtain millions of pounds of public assets, is also presiding over a huge money raising exercise for the Conservatives which involves the Prime Minister and other key Government figures. We are no longer told that the Prime Minister does not know who the Conservative fundraisers are - only that they have no influence over him."

The MP added: "The conflict of interest can only be resolved by the withdrawal of Mr Beckwith's consortium from the bidding for the takeover of Ministry of Defence Housing and benefits offices. There must be a clear separation of Conservative fund raising from the disposal of public assets."

Note to Editors: A comparison of the honours lists and lists of Tory Party donors consistently shows that the lion share of honours goes to industrialists who have
donated to the Conservative Party. Under John Major (1991 to Birthday Honours 1995) there were 58 honours to industry of which 38 were to donors to the Conservative party.

Just two weeks ago a classic example of the Conservatives rewarding donors to the Conservative party with knighthoods was reported. Sir Graham Kirkham donated £4 million to the Conservatives and then was knighted "for services to charity" (Independent 11 July 1996.)

For Immediate Release. Number: 254/96.Thursday 25 July 1996

MP CALLS FOR TIGHTER AIRCRAFT SAFETY

As Britain approaches the height of the holiday season, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for tighter controls on aircraft safety. Last March the MP told the Commons that elderly Russian Yak aircraft were being chartered to take holidaymakers to Mediterranean sun spots.

The MP said: “Aircraft safety concerns people. Over the past few months we have seen the ValuJet crash in Florida and the refusal of passengers to board the flight of the now defunct Excalibur Airlines because of smoke in the cabin. Now we have had the horror of the TWA crash.”

“I have consistently pressed the Government to improve the monitoring of the mechanical and operational safety standards of foreign registered aircraft but, despite some concessions, dangerous loopholes remain.”

“We now have a scheduled programme of inspection of carriers within the UK where countries are identified as risky by the FAA programme or because of passenger complaints. But despite that, checks for air worthiness and operational standards do not take place as a matter of course on foreign registered aircraft chartered by tour operators. The UK aviation regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority, has no jurisdiction over operating standards of foreign registered aircraft unless obvious defects are apparent.”

“The Department of Transport needs to take a much more pro-active and systematic approach to ensuring flights to and from the UK meet our own safety standards. At the moment the DoT's approach is merely to "increase surveillance where we believe a particular aircraft is unsafe".

“We need to tighten the safety standards of foreign registered aircraft and blacklist countries whose aircraft do not meet safety and crew standards. We need to operate random checks.”

“Above all, we need to protect UK airlines and reputable tour operators from being undercut by sub-standard foreign-registered aircraft.”

Note to Editors: For many years British charter airlines have occasionally used foreign registered aircraft to augment their fleets during peak periods, to recover delays, to replace aircraft undergoing

unforeseen maintenance, or in anticipation of meeting the requirements necessary to register them permanently in the UK. British, and since l January 1993 EU, legislation provides for the necessary permits and waivers. The policy of the Civil Aviation Authority has been to permit such operations within defined limits of duration and numbers.

In recent years, however, there have been repeated instances of exploitation of the legislation for speculative short term operations by brokers who are able to charter foreign registered aircraft whose safety standards may be suspect.

Since 1 January 1993, a British air carrier wishing to lease a foreign registered aircraft is required to obtain a waiver from the Department of Transport. However, such a waiver is not required where a foreign-aircraft is leased or chartered by a company which is not an air carrier e. g. a broker or tour operator. From the same date, a British air carrier wishing to use a foreign registered aircraft is required to obtain the prior approval of the Civil Aviation Authority. This approval relates to the safety standards of the operation. No such approval is required where the lessee or charterer is not an air carrier.

Aircraft can be registered in any state providing that the state is a member of ICAO (the international aviation body). The barriers to entry for tour operators or brokers entering the UK charter market by leasing foreign registered aircraft are low since there are hundreds of redundant modern airliners Iying idle, available on attractive arrangements through leasing companies. However, if an aircraft is leased short term the lessee may have no commitment to major maintenance. Similarly, crews may be hired on short term contracts and patched together which makes team work (essential for operational safety) more difficult. Aircraft can be registered in whichever state offers the least bureaucracy or expense. Such states may well require the operator to provide liability cover only to the very low minimum level required by the Warsaw Convention

The problem with relying on approval by authorities in countries of registration for safety certification is that many foreign registered aircraft operating in the UK do not have to return to their country of registration and they are unable to control or enforce safety standards outside their own territory.

For Immediate Release. Number: 255/96.Wednesday 24 July 1996

DECISION ON DEFENCE CONTRACTS DELAYED

Rowdy scenes erupted in the Commons today when Ministers refused to tell the House what was happening to multi-million pound defence contracts - vital to industry in the North West.

The row exploded on the floor of the Commons when Ribble Valley MP, Nigel Evans, accused the Labour Party of damaging employment in the defence industry by cancelling the TSR 2 jet fighter in 1965 - thirty one years ago.

The Labour MP for next door Pendle, Gordon Prentice, was furious when the Ribble Valley Conservative refused to give way to interventions from Opposition MPs, including himself.

Prentice commented: "Nigel Evans had secured a debate on the defence industry in the North West. It wasn't a debate but an orchestrated serious of interventions from Conservative MPs. Nigel Evans behaved disgracefully in not giving way to a single Labour MP. Typically, he sought to blame Labour for running down the defence industry a generation ago! We are interested in what is happening now - not thirty one years ago."

"Pendle will be affected if the defence orders are shelved because Kenneth Clarke wants to make room for pre-election tax cuts. The Financial Times today reports a clash in the Cabinet which could jeopardise parts of the defence procurement package. Firms such as Cleveland Guest in Colne are biting their fingertips, waiting to hear what is happening, but there is only silence."

For Immediate Release. Number: 256/96.Wednesday 24 July 1996

MP FLIES THE FLAG

The Union Flag should be flown on Shakespeare's birthday says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. At present the flag is flown on royal birthdays and on a handful of other notable dates. The MP was speaking at Westminster following the Commons defeat of a ten minute rule Bill on the Union Flag promoted by Conservative MP, Michael Fabricant.

The Pendle MP, a Scot, recently asked the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, if he would arrange for the Scottish national flag, the Saltire, to be flown on the birthday of Robert Burns and Robert the Bruce. The Minister said he was giving the suggestion consideration.

The MP said: "The Union Flag has been appropriated by the Conservative Party who wrap themselves in the flag. I want to see it become the symbol of the nation - as the French flag is or the stars and

stripes. Why shouldn't we celebrate notable men and women from the pages of English, Scottish and Welsh history by flying the flag on their birthdays?"

"At the moment the flag is flown on the birthdays of HM the Queen and Queen Mother and for a clutch of Royal Highnesses. But what will happen to the Princess of Wales? She has been stripped of her HRH."

Note to Editors: The Union Flag is flown on 6 February (Queen's Accession) 19 February (Birthday of Duke of York) 1 March (St David's Day in Wales only) 10 March (Birthday of Prince Edward) 11 March (Commonwealth Day) 21 April (Birthday of HM The Queen) 23 April (St George's Day in England only) 2 June (Coronation Day) 10 June (Birthday of Duke of Edinburgh) 15 June (The Queen's Official Birthday) 1 July (Birthday of Princess of Wales) 4 August (Birthday of HM Queen Mother) 15 August (Birthday of the Princess Royal) 21 August (Birthday of Princess Margaret) 10 November (Remembrance Sunday) 14 November (Birthday of Prince of Wales) 20 November (Queen's Wedding Day) 30 November (St Andrew's Day in Scotland only).

For Immediate Release. Number: 257/96. Monday 29 July 1996

MP CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF MINIMUM STANDARDS OF FIRE COVER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling on the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, to look again at his Department's minimum fire cover standards which the MP says are out of date and inadequate.

The MP's concern is revealed in a letter sent this week to Lancashire's Chief Fire Officer, J.G. Russel, as part of the County Fire Authority's consultation on standards of fire cover in Lancashire which runs until 31 August.

The MP commented: "There have been suggestions locally that the fire authority wants to axe one of the the retained fire engines at Barnoldswick and another at Colne. I have told the Chief Fire Officer I would resist this. The service in the two towns is provided by volunteers and the service we get is a snip at the price."

"The real villain of the piece is the Home Secretary whose national fire cover minimum standards are woefully inadequate. His refusal to update these has had an unfortunate knock on effect. Lancashire's Chief Fire Officer is obliged to produce recommendations to the County

Fire Authority in line with out of date Home Office minimum standards."

"At the end of the day, the Home Secretary himself has to approve any changes in fire cover which the Fire Authority may be minded to make."

Note to Editors: The consultation runs to August 31. A working party from the County's Fire Protection Committee will consider the response to the consultation on 10 October. The County's Fire Committee will again look at the review of fire cover at its Budget meeting on 31 October.

For Immediate Release. Number: 258/96. Monday 29 July 1996

MP CALLS FOR ACTION ON KASHMIR

An incoming Labour Government would make the resolution of the conflict in Kashmir a top priority according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He told a meeting in Nelson last night, organised by the Jammu & Kashmir Welfare Association, that the crisis in Kashmir demanded urgent action.

The MP said: "Since 1990, 40,000 Kashmiris have been killed in Indian occupied Kashmir and countless others have been mutilated. Women have been raped and children left orphaned. The situation is quite appalling. 700,000 Indian troops are stationed there - one soldier for every ten Kashmiris."

"Kashmiris want the right to self determination. I firmly believe there should be a plebiscite in that troubled land to allow the people of Kashmir to decide their own form of Government and their own future. A system imposed by India has not worked and clearly never will."

The MP, who was speaking to a packed meeting at Nelson's Civic Theatre, said the British Government, because of the UK's historic ties with India and Pakistan, was well placed to broker a settlement. The Government convened two conferences in London in an attempt to resolve the Bosnia conflict. We should do the same with Kashmir."

The MP added: "We also need to press the new Indian Government to give free and unconditional access to Kashmir to the world's press, to British MPs who have been denied visas, and to Lord Avebury and representatives of human rights groups such as Amnesty International. Kashmir is one of the world's forgotten conflicts. We need to wake up to what is happening there."

For Immediate Release. Number: 259/96. Monday 29 July 1996

MP DETECTS UNEASE OVER SALE OF MoD MARRIED QUARTERS ESTATE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted Prime Minister, John Major, over the decision to sell to the private sector the Ministry of Defence married quarters estate. The MP has written to the PM saying the name of Premier Club member, John Beckwith, should be struck from the short list of four who are bidding to buy the army homes. Entry to the Premier Club to open to those who can make a contribution to Conservative Party funds of at least £100,000.

The MP, who is furious about the sale, decided to fire off a letter to the Prime Minister after meeting the Lancashire military at Saturday's Beating the Retreat ceremony at Fulwood Barracks at Preston.

The MP said: "I witnessed a very impressive display at Fulwood with young parachutists dropping from the skies to land on a sixpence in the parade ground. Then we heard a marvellous music programme from the Corps of Drums 5/8 Kings and North West Infantry (TA) (Kings) Band and the Lancashire Artillery Volunteers Band and others. There was tremendous pageantry in glorious sunshine."

"Serving military personnel are of course always constrained in what they can say but I had an opportunity of speaking to a number of retired soldiers who are free to speak their minds and they are clearly dismayed at the married quarters sell off."

The MP continued: "I think the whole thing leaves a very sour taste in the mouth. To sell our armed forces homes to someone like John Beckwith - a contributor to Tory Party funds - is to rub salt into the wound."

For Immediate Release. Number: 260/96. Monday 29 July 1996

JUNK MAIL ADDS TO POSTIE'S BURDEN

Pendle's postmen and women are wilting under the strain of bulging postbags says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims junk mail, Sky TV magazines and millions of unwanted missives are taking their toll on the postie.

The MP commented: “I saw my own postman stagger up the street this morning with two enormous postbags and an armful of Sky TV magazines and it got me thinking. The strap to his postbag had given way under the enormous weight. It seems to me from my own observations that our postmen and women are being expected to carry heavier and heavier loads. We are surely approaching the time when one extra letter will break the postie’s back. In Barnoldswick, where I live, I don’t think I’ve seen trolleys being used although in some areas they are commonplace.”

The MP has written to Post Office chiefs in Preston with his concerns.

ends

For Immediate Release. Number: 261/96.Wednesday 31 July 1996

MP ACCUSES GOVERNMENT OF “ROBBING THE VICTIMS” OF ACCIDENTS AND DISEASE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has accused the Government of robbing personal injury victims of millions of pounds every year by clawing back state benefits paid to them. The MP says the current situation is intolerable where people suffering from a major disability caused by injury see their compensation grabbed by the Government.

Speaking in his constituency earlier today the MP said: “People who have suffered from a disabling accident are hit for a second time when their compensation goes straight into the Treasury coffers. I have a number of constituents who tragically are victims of the Compensation Recovery Unit and have lost thousands of pounds.”

“Nationally, the total amount recovered during 1995/6 was £135.1 million and if the current trend continues the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison, estimates this year it will be in the region of £145m. The highest amount clawed back from a victim of a personal injury - a neck injury - was £93,950. Just think of the difference that sum would have made to the victim’s life.”

The MP continued: “The Social Security Select Committee under the chairmanship of my colleague Frank Field produced a report on compensation recovery exactly a year ago. The Committee recommended that responsibility for paying back money to the Government should lie with the insurance companies rather than the victim of the accident or disease. In its response to the report in October 1995, the Government promised to consult widely on possible changes to the current system but since then the silence has been

deafening. I have now written to the Social Security Secretary to find out what's happening and if and when he is prepared to change the way in which the CRU works."
more follows:

"ROBBING THE VICTIMS"

"There are people here in Pendle as elsewhere who feel cheated and robbed. The system is crying out to be changed."

ends

Note to Editors: Section 22 of the 1989 Social Security Act gave the Department of Social Security the power to reclaim in full a range of state benefits paid to a victim of injury or ill health who has won more than £2,500 in legal damages as a result of a personal injury claim. A special part of the DSS, the Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) carries out this function. The money is deducted from the award before it is paid over to the victim and various benefits paid by a certain date are also deducted - including Income Support, Unemployment Benefit, Statutory Sick Pay and Disablement Benefit. Before the 1989 Act, half of the amount paid under a smaller number of benefits was deducted from the award before it was paid but this reduction simply reduced the award - the state got nothing.

The ten highest sums recovered from individual victims of illness and injury/disease in 1995/6:

Amount	Injury/disease
£93,950	neck injury
£91,601	multiple injuries
£84,630	back/spinal injury
£79,186	multiple injuries
£73,217	head/facial injury
£72,337	arm injury
£70,756	misc injury - cuts, lacerations etc
£70,522	head/facial injury
£70,014	misc injury
£69,945	multiple injuries

For Immediate Release. Number: 262/96.Wednesday 31 July 1996

MP BACKS MANIFESTO FOR FARM ANIMALS

Farm animal welfare is an issue moving to the top of the political agenda according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, who is a

member of the Commons Agriculture Select Committee, is backing a "Manifesto for Farm Animals" published by the campaigning organisation Compassion in World Farming.

Speaking in his North East Lancashire constituency, the MP said: "I know from my postbag there is growing public concern about animal welfare, fuelled over recent years by food scares and, most recently, BSE. People care about what they eat. They want food that is safe to eat with high standards of animal health and welfare. A responsible society should ensure the animals it rears for its food are treated humanely."

"In the quest for ever cheaper food, farm animals can too easily be treated as commodities not the sentient creatures they are. Indeed, under the Treaty of Rome animals are currently classified as agricultural products!"

The MP added: "The Manifesto for Farm Animals is not a zany shopping list of unrealisable and unachievable objectives. It is a compilation of best practice already being followed by thousands of farmers."

ends

Note to Editors: The Manifesto reads:

Housing:

• Positive encouragement of systems which allow daily access to the outdoors
• Comfortable bedding
• Natural light and ventilation where possible
• Space allowances to permit natural movement and exercise
more follows:

MP BACKS MANIFESTO FOR FARM ANIMALS

Physiology

• A planned move away from fast growing strains in eg chickens
• Use of slower growing, more sustainable animals
• Adequate and appropriate feed for each species
• Access to clean water at all times
• No non therapeutic mutilations, operations or invasive procedures
• Ability to perform natural behaviours, eg rooting, dust-bathing, grazing

Psychology

- Companionship of own kind
- No isolation or overcrowding
- Natural weaning periods
- Prohibition of electric goads and rough handling

General Welfare

- No live exports for further fattening or slaughter
- Minimum transport with a maximum total journey time of eight hours
- Urgent reform of livestock markets
- Encouragement of alternatives to markets such as direct sales and electronic marketing
- Licensing of all stock handlers
- Compulsory minimum stunning currents in slaughterhouses.

For Immediate Release. Number: 263/96. Thursday 1 August 1996

MP CONDEMNS HOME AFFAIRS REPORT ON GUN CONTROL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, stepped into the controversy over gun control when he condemned the key recommendation of the leaked report of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee. By a majority of one, the Committee said the banning of hand guns would be impractical. Six Tory MPs voted against a ban. Five Labour voted for.

Gordon Prentice said: "I am disappointed the Committee could not bring itself to recommend the banning of hand guns kept at home. There is no conceivable reason why anyone should need to keep a gun at home. Those required for sport should be kept under lock and key at licensed gun clubs."

"I met some of the parents of the children massacred at Dunblane when they presented their snowdrop petition at Westminster last month. I hardly knew what to say. Their lives have been devastated by the actions of a crazed gun fanatic."

"We wait to see what Lord Cullen recommends in his Inquiry but, so far, I have not seen any evidence which would persuade me not to vote for the banning of hand guns kept at home."

"The Conservative MPs who voted for no action speak for no-one but themselves."

Note to Editors: In March this year the MP backed moves to ban hand guns from being kept anywhere other than at licensed gun clubs. He said at the time he would be supporting moves to tighten up gun control "including psychological testing if needs be." He said: "I also want to see the House of Commons gun club closed down and the space given over to a creche. It is astonishing that Parliament can find space for a gun club but not for a creche."

Number: 264/96. Embargoed until Monday 5 August 1996

PENDLE HIPPODROME SCOOPS LOTTERY GRANT

There will be singing and dancing in the aisles today in the Pendle Hippodrome Theatre in Colne. The Arts Council of England has just announced a Lottery Grant of £17,566 towards roof repairs and the purchase of a stage lighting console.

The Hippodrome Theatre in Colne is home to amateur drama and choral groups.

The area's MP, Gordon Prentice, is delighted with the news. "I am a passionate supporter of the arts so this is excellent news. The arts, in all its forms and varieties, contributes massively to our local and national cultural life."

For Immediate Release. Number: 265/96. Wednesday 7 August 96

MP APPEALS FOR RE-THINK OVER KNOTTS LANE

A report going up to Pendle Council's Colne Area Committee this Thursday is recommending the go-ahead for the re-opening of the old cement batching plant at the top of Knotts Lane which has been mothballed for six years. The proposal has infuriated local MP Gordon Prentice, who will be attending the committee meeting in support of local residents.

The MP said: "This is a clear cut case where the council should be supporting, without reservation, local people. They do not want the cement works on their doorstep with all the noise and dust and danger that goes with it. Pendle Council should stop prevaricating and come off the fence."

"The Council has always maintained it is on the side of local people. Well now is their chance to prove it. The land is earmarked for housing in the council's own draft plan! On Thursday I want the

application by Tarmac to reopen the old concrete batching plant thrown out by the Colne Area Committee. No excuses. No delaying tactics. Simple as that."

Note to Editors: Under section 102 of the Town and Country Planning Act a planning authority may require the discontinuance of use of land, or place conditions on its future use. A discontinuance order can authorise any current use of the land, or give permission for other development on the same land. Discontinuance orders can apply either to lawful or unlawful uses of land. If the use was unlawful, the developer has no right to compensation. For a lawful use, compensation may be payable. In making a discontinuance order, the local authority is to have regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations. This power cannot, therefore. be exercised on on the grounds of health and safety. Environmental considerations might also be excluded. If the effect of a discontinuance order is that land cannot be used for any beneficial purpose, the owner can serve a purchase notice on the local authority.

A discontinuance order only takes effect when the Environment Secretary has confirmed it. He may modify the order, and any planning permission granted with it. He may grant some other planning permission. The person on whom the order is served has the right to be heard by the Planning Inspectorate and can insist on a Public Local Inquiry. Contact: Gordon Prentice MP: 0941 111249

For Immediate Release. Number: 266/96. Friday 9 August 1996

MP TO MEET TARMAC IN BID TO BREAK LOG-JAM OVER KNOTTS LANE

Embattled residents of Knotts Lane in Colne last night won an important victory when Pendle Council's Colne Area Committee turned down a recommendation from Council Officers to give the go-ahead for the controversial re-opening Tarmac's concrete batching plant.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who was at the meeting in support of local people, commented: "The Committee has given everyone a breathing space by voting to defer the matter. No-one wants the works to re-open except Tarmac and that is why I have written today to the company's Chief Executive, Neville Simms, asking to meet him to get this thing resolved once and for all."

"Sheila Smith and Eric Crimmins and all the local residents have campaigned with great energy against Tarmac's plan and they put their case persuasively to the Council last night. I do not want to see Tarmac ride roughshod over local people. It is a giant company and it has its

public image to think about. If they try to push this through, the cuddly, environmentally friendly image they are cultivating will dissolve overnight."

"Had I been a member of the Committee last night I would have refused planning permission, as Councillors Tim Ormrod and Sarah Hill were minded to, in the knowledge the issue would go to appeal - probably next year. The site has been inactive for six years and the draft local plan earmarks the land for housing. This - and the reasons behind the proposed change in land use - would weigh with the Secretary of State at appeal."

"The Council says it has no money to risk at Appeal. Tell that to the residents of Knotts Lane who know, as I do, the Council got £2m from the sale of its share in the local bus company. The Council should throw all its resources behind the residents of Knotts Lane."

Note to Editors: A refusal of planning permission could lead to at least four different outcomes. The company could appeal against the refusal of planning permission. It could serve a purchase notice on the council. It could start up operations at the plant using the existing planning permission (but see below on discontinuance powers) or it could abandon the plant and try to sell the land.

Appeal against planning refusal. The company would appeal to the Secretary of State who could grant the appeal, refuse it or award permission with such conditions as he saw fit. There would be an inquiry and people would have the opportunity to put their case. The Minister is likely to give weight to the draft local plan if it is near to adoption.

Purchase Notice. Under s137 of the Act, if planning permission is refused Tarmac could serve a purchase notice on Pendle Council if they could claim

- the land has become incapable of reasonably beneficial use; and
- that the land cannot be rendered capable of reasonably beneficial use by the carrying out of any other development for which planning permission has been granted or for which the local planning authority or the Secretary of State has undertaken to grant planning permission.

Following issue of such a Notice the planning authority must serve a response notice within three months. If it rejects the purchase notice then the case is referred to the Secretary of State who could then confirm the notice in whole or in part; grant planning permission the

refusal of which gave rise to the notice, or direct that planning permission for some other development be granted if applied for.

There are other powers available to the Council. Under section 102 of the Town and Country Planning Act a planning authority may require the discontinuance of use of land, or place conditions on its future use. A discontinuance order can authorise any current use of the land, or give permission for other development on the same land. Discontinuance orders can apply either to lawful or unlawful uses of land. If the use was unlawful, the developer has no right to compensation. For a lawful use, compensation may be payable. In making a discontinuance order, the local authority is to have regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations. This power cannot, therefore, be exercised on on the grounds of health and safety. Environmental considerations might also be excluded. If the effect of a discontinuance order is that land cannot be used for any beneficial purpose, the owner can serve a purchase notice on the local authority.

A discontinuance order only takes effect when the Environment Secretary has confirmed it. He may modify the order, and any planning permission granted with it. He may grant some other planning permission. The person on whom the order is served has the right to be heard by the Planning Inspectorate and can insist on a Public Local Inquiry. The MP has said he would back the residents of Knotts Lane at a public inquiry

For Immediate Release. Number: 267/96. Wednesday 7 August 96

MORE HOUSING MISERY says PENDLE MP

“Government Ministers are suggesting the worst is over for homeowners. But figures just published show that 1,000 families are having their homes repossessed every week" says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: “The Government is desperate to cover up its betrayal of homeowners. Ministers are now running around the country telling people the housing market is rosy and that the miseries of negative equity and housing repossessions are at an end. This is another Tory lie.”

“They can't escape from the facts. And the fact is 1,000 families are still having their homes repossessed every week. Over 300,000 properties have been repossessed since John Major became Prime Minister.”

“Mind you, Tory lies about housing in the run-up to a General Election are nothing new. In the run up to the 1992 General Election, John Major told national radio “We've stopped the repossessions just before Christmas”. Since he said that a further quarter of a million homes have been repossessed.”

The MP added: “It's the same old Tory Lies. And it's the same old Tory misery for homeowners.”

Note to Editors: Figures published this week by the Lord Chancellor's Department show that repossessions are still running at 1,000 a week. The betrayal of homeowners is continuing. The facts of the housing market are - repossessions continue at a rate of 1,000 a week

a quarter of a million households have lost their homes since John Major told a radio interviewer in January 1992 "We've stopped the repossessions just before Christmas."

325,340 properties have been repossessed since John Major became Prime Minister in 1990.
more follows:

MORE HOUSING MISERY

Over 1 million families are still in negative equity

In June this year, the MP released figures from Nelson County Court which showed Pendle’s housing crisis was getting worse. At the time, the MP said: “Here in Pendle last year, 209 families lost their homes - repossessed by the bank or building society. This compares with 175 in 1994 and 193 in 1993.”

The MP observed: “A generation ago, when Labour was last in power, there were fewer than 3,000 repossessions across the whole country. Now there are over 200 in our local county court. For every home repossessed under the last Labour Government in 1979 there are now 17 homes being repossessed under the Conservatives.”

Pendle has one of the highest rates of home ownership in the country. 86% of the housing stock is private (75% for the North West Region and 76% for England). In the private sector in Pendle, tenure breaks down as follows: 92% owner occupied (87% NW region and 84% England) and 8% rented (13% NW region and 16% England).

For Immediate Release. Number: 268/96. Wednesday 7 August 96

MP TO MEET NHS CHIEFS OVER "HEALTH RATIONING" ALLEGATIONS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet the Chairman and Chief Executive of the East Lancashire Health Authority today to discuss their plans for the area's health care over the coming twelve months.

The MP said: "In June the ELHA published its Health Care Plan setting out its priorities. Under the Government's new set-up, our Health Authority, purchases health care for local people from hospitals in NE Lancashire and beyond. So the decisions the Health Authority takes are very important to us all."

"Many people have complained to me about the difficulty of getting, for example, an NHS dentist or of getting treatment for allergies and these are just some of the issues I shall want to raise with the Health Authority."

"Many Multiple Sclerosis sufferers have told me they fear our local Health Authority will not give the go-ahead for the purchase of new drugs such as Beta Interferon which can arrest the condition. I find it very disconcerting indeed that people who suffer from MS can have their life chances determined according to where they live in the UK. It is clearly the case that some Health Authorities are more likely to buy this expensive but life saving drug than others."

Note to Editors: The ELHA writes: Every year, East Lancashire Health Authority publishes a plan for the future of health care in East Lancashire. Some of the objectives in the plan are those set by the Government but we also have the flexibility to develop local priorities. The plan is shared in detail with health professionals, local hospital and community services, the Community Health Council (CHC), Local Authorities, voluntary organisations and other important local bodies. East Lancashire Health Authority covers the six Districts of Blackburn, Hyndburn, Ribble Valley, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale.

Since 1990 the role of Health Authorities has changed. Nowadays, they don't

manage hospitals or community services, which are run as NHS Trusts, each with its own board of Directors.

The Health Authority's role is to commission and pay for hospital and community care for over 500,000 people living in East Lancashire. Decisions about what sort of hospital and community services are needed are only taken after careful planning. Local issues, local people and local GPs are always considered. The Health Authority spends around £300 million on people's health each year. This includes preventing illness as well as curing it, for example ensuring that East Lancashire children are vaccinated against serious diseases.

East Lancashire Health Authority co-ordinates the work of family doctors, pharmacists, dentists and opticians. It is responsible for ensuring that doctors surgeries are evenly spread across East Lancashire, that everyone has a reasonable choice of doctor with whom they can register and that practices operate sensible opening times and have appropriate support staff in place. From April 1996, just over half the GPs in East Lancashire were allocated their own funds to purchase health care for their patients. However, whether or not a GP is a Fundholder makes no difference to patient's rights, which are the same for everyone in East Lancashire. In 1996/97, East Lancashire Health Authority will be working with all GPs, to improve the quality of patient facilities so that doctors can continue to develop the level of services they offer.

The Health Authority is also looking to develop guidelines so that an increased number of diabetes and asthma sufferers receive support and regular clinical reviews from their own GP, as well as from hospital consultants.

Locality Commissioning: In his 1995 report, the Director of Public Health demonstrated that there are significant variations in health and social circumstances within East Lancashire and highlighted the need to take account of this in the commissioning process. Over the next twelve months, East Lancashire Health Authority will be working to allocate resources in the areas where they are most needed and will be developing a system of 'locality based commissioning.' Locality Managers, who are part of the Health Authority, will work closely with local GPs and will, by April 1997, each hold their own budget, with which they will commission health care for the residents living in their District, paying special attention to very local needs.

The Five Fundamentals: The Health Authority has five main priorities to take health services into the year 2000. These are: * To improve the health of local people. We want to reduce rates of heart disease, cancer and accidents as well as improving sexual and mental health. * To encourage joint working between health, social and community services to ensure that support is available for people who wish to be

cared for at home instead of in hospital. * To organise first class hospital care for East Lancashire residents, both locally and in 'centres of excellence' such as St. James's, Leeds. We want to ensure that as many people as possible are treated each year and that services are of the highest quality. * To work closely with GPs so that plans for the delivery of local health care are complementary and meet local needs. * To ensure that we see real improvements in the quality of health services for people in East Lancashire and to listen carefully to the views of carers and patients.

Exclusive to the Town Crier. No: 269/96. Wed 7 August 1996

IN THE DOG HOUSE

Barlick's dogs better clean up their act - or else! The town's MP. Gordon Prentice, has hailed a new Act of Parliament which aims to force dog owners to clean up after their pets. The MP said: "Dogs have got to answer the call of nature but it needn't be on a pavement in the middle of town!"

The new Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 became the law of the land on 17 June this year. The Act will let local authorities designate land on which an offence of failing to clear up after a dog will apply. The land must be open to the air and be land to which the public have access, with or without payment. Land which is predominantly woodland, agricultural land, marshland, moor or heath are exempted.

On "designated land" or in "poop scoop" zones a person in charge of a dog which defecates art any time will be guilty of an offence if he or she fails to remove the dog dirt. Blind people are exempted from the Act.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said the Act was long overdue and would be widely welcomed: "The local Council will have the power to designate land where dog owners will have to clean up after their pets. And this designation will not require the approval of central government - as is, absurdly, the case at present."

Note to Editors: The Department of the Environment has invited local authorities and other interested bodies to comment by 13 September on the proposed implementation of the new Act. It is expected that the new powers will become available to local authorities by early next year.

For Immediate Release. Number: 270/96. Wednesday 7 August 96

LABOUR CALLS FOR TOUGHER GUN PROTECTION

“Conservative MPs have blocked moves to increase protection against the threat of handguns, when we actually need tougher protection against the misuse of firearms, including a ban on handguns” says Pendle MP Gordon Prentice.

Last week the Pendle MP slated the six Conservative MPs who said it was impractical to ban hand guns. “They should have been with me when I met the parents of the children who were gunned down at Dunblane.”

"People here in Pendle deserve better protection than we're getting from this Government. We want our streets, our homes and our schools to be safe and free from the gun menace. We don't want to become ‘gun happy' like the USA.”

“That's why we need more and tougher protection against firearms. What we propose won't affect people who genuinely need them for work or who use them on ranges. But it will keep them out of the hands of the crazed fanatics who are a menace to us all.”

Note to Editors: Labour has long believed there should be far stricter controls on the availability of guns to ensure the proper protection of the public. In evidence to the Cullen Inquiry, Labour called for the banning of handguns and rifles above .22 calibre and said we were minded to propose that handguns should be prohibited. Up to now the police have been obliged to prove that someone is not fit to hold a gun. Labour wants to place the burden of proof on the applicant, not the police.

WHY THE LAW NEEDS TO BE STRENGTHENED

Handguns are particularly dangerous firearms. They are easily concealed and carried. Most are capable of rapidly firing a large number of rounds without reloading. Some 57,000 people hold firearms certificates for handguns.

All target shooting disciplines in the Olympic Games are restricted to handguns of .22 inch calibre.

Some handguns are used by casualty slaughterers, vets and farmers who have to deal with vermin. A restriction to .22 inch calibre or below for such purposes would pose no practical difficulty to those involved. Special certification can be designed to cover these exceptional circumstances.

Labour also appreciates that shotguns are in widespread use in rural areas by farmers keeping down vermin and by people shooting game. We have made clear that there is a case for distinguishing between shotguns and other firearms, within an overall policy which aims to stop guns getting into the wrong hands.

For Immediate Release. Number: 271/96.Thursday 8 August 1996

NHS DENTISTS "A DYING BREED" says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has vowed to fight for NHS dentistry which, he says, will soon become a folk memory in large parts the country.

The MP was speaking in his North East Lancashire constituency after meeting health chiefs yesterday at the Nelson HQ of the East Lancashire Health Authority.

The MP said: "The chairman of the Health Authority, Bill Ashworth, is clearly doing his very best under very difficult circumstances. The plain fact is there is a desert of dentists prepared to treat patients under the NHS and the Government is not doing enough to tackle the problem. Virginia Bottomley has made cash injections of £40,000 available to health authorities to help them set up new NHS dental provision in areas of need. But this, apparently, is not enough."

The MP added: "I am in touch with the Minister to get chapter and verse on how the Government's new initiative is working on the ground. I have a clear personal interest as the town where I live, Barnoldswick, has no NHS dentist. It is not a hamlet but a town of more than 10,000 people."

"The situation is absolutely dire."

For Immediate Release. Number: 272/96. Monday 12 August 1996

PENDLE MP BACKS PLAN TO REFORM LAW ON POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

Pendle's Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing new plans to reform the law governing party financing. He says the law is crying out to be overhauled.

The MP observed: “We are now seeing a rash of blood red “New Labour New Danger” posters appearing all over East Lancashire. I still haven’t forgotten the Conservative posters in 1992 proclaiming “Labour’s Tax Bombshell.” The Conservative strategy is to scare and frighten the voters and they have millions of pounds to spend on their mendacious campaigns. What they say is a matter for them but how they get their millions is a matter for all of us.”

The MP’s comments come in the wake of a blast from the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, who said last week: “Over the past month, the summer weather has brought out the stench of political scandal from the coffers of the Tory Party. We have learnt that by slipping the Tory Party a hundred grand a businessman can get an intimate dinner with the Prime Minister. We have discovered that some of the companies who stand to make most out of the sale of Britain's railways are the very companies who give most to the Tory party.”

The Pendle MP added: “The really worrying questions about Tory funds arise not from what we know, but over what we do not know. The Labour Party is open about who funds us and at our Conference in October we will be declaring the source of any donation over £5,000. We will refuse any donation from a foreign source not eligible to vote in a British election. Can the Conservative Party afford to make the same commitment? The Conservative Party has got too much to hide to come clean about who pays its bills.”

more follows:
POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

Gordon Prentice added: “There are four key reforms we propose to pass into law:

• Every political party must declare the source of all donations over £5,000.

• No company shall make a political donation without first balloting shareholders to set up a political fund.

• Any shareholder must have the right to opt out of their share of a political fund.

• No political party shall accept donations from foreign sources.

“Less than a year ago we were reading in the Press about the enormous £19 million overdraft run up by Conservative Central Office. Now the Conservatives are spending money like there is no tomorrow on the

biggest pre-election advertising campaign ever seen in Britain. It started with “It Hurt But It Worked”. Now we have the ludicrous “New Labour New Danger” and, no doubt, there will be much more to come in the same vein.”

“The British people should know who is bankrolling the Conservative Party. There can be no valid objection to the principle behind any of our reforms.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 273/96. Sunday 11 August 1996

ONE-DAY-SALES CON MAN EXPOSED

Stephen Beach - the Gloucester based trader who conned people into buying shoddy goods at one day sales at the Great Marsden Hotel and the North Valley Community Centre last October - has been exposed in today’s Sunday Mail along with his father, Derek Beach. The paper is published in Scotland.

The newspaper quotes the views of Pendle MP Gordon Prentice who last year described Stephen Beach in the Commons as an “unscrupulous fraudster”.

Prentice said: “The Sunday Mail deserves a medal for tracking down the 55 year old Derek Beach and publishing a photograph of him taken at the Beach family cash and carry in Gloucester. Beach has been travelling all over Scotland, often using an alias, selling his shoddy goods for inflated prices. People north of the border have been conned with the same techniques used to dupe folk here in Pendle.”

“I take a certain amount of satisfaction in seeing Beach unmasked. The law needs to be changed to protect people from predatory con men. When Labour gets into power we will bring in new legislation to stop people like Beach ripping off the public using sharp practice and trickery.”

Note to Editors: The Sunday Mail reveals that 10 days ago Derek Beach was convicted on four charges relating to one day sales at Brecon in Wales. He was ordered to pay £800 compensation to his victims. His son, Stephen Beach, has a long list of convictions relating to one day sales. He is currently under investigation by trading standards officers. The paper reveals he was recently fined £250 with £75 costs for offences in Burnley. The most recent one day sale in Pendle was held at Barnoldswick Civic Hall on Tuesday 23 January. After a flood of complaints, the MP secured a Commons debate on the issue, identifying the trader who descended on the town as Steve Johnson who operates

from 2 Princess Street, Blackpool. Pendle council no longer rents out its premises for one day sales.

For Immediate Release. Number: 274/96. Monday 12 August 1996

MP URGES NYNEX TO LOOK AGAIN AT CABLING WEST CRAVEN

The cable giant Nynex could look again at bidding for a licence to cable West Craven says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking after meeting Nynex chiefs at the company's Blackburn area HQ. They told him only two small areas from the original Pendle franchise remain to be cabled. Under the terms of the original deal, the West Craven area was excluded.

The MP said: "When Nynex first started digging up the streets there was an avalanche of complaints. People were upset about the reinstatement works to the pavements and about all the noise and obstruction. Lots of folk were concerned about the possible damage to tree roots. However, over recent months the number of complaints has tailed off dramatically. One or two are still unresolved and I am pressing Nynex to sort things out."

"Once an area has been cabled, it is then up to the individual whether he or she decides to get wired up. In West Craven and next door over in Skipton people don't have the choice. Many people have told me that is unfortunate - to say the least. The information superhighway could be passing West Craven by and digital television - with wide screens and multiple channels - could arrive here long after it has reached the rest of the country. West Craven must not become a technological backwater."

Note to Editors: Before the Broadcasting Act 1990, the Cable Authority specified an area to be covered, and it was a condition of the licence that a certain proportion of premises would be passed. The Cable Authority was abolished by the 1990 Act, and its functions taken over by the Independent Television Commission. The ITC permits operators to choose the nature and level of service they wish to offer the public. In response to expressions of interests from particular localities, the ITC draw up a map extending over a fairly wide area, not already covered by a cable franchise, which they intend to advertise. An applicant must then identify which parts the system will serve and if successful will be licensed to meet this commitment. There is no requirement to go beyond what is economically viable.

For Immediate Release. Number: 275/96. Monday 12 August 1996

HOUSE BUILDING DOWN AGAIN

New figures unearthed by local MP, Gordon Prentice, show that fewer and fewer homes are being built.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency earlier today the MP said: “Back in 1979, no fewer than 8,649 council houses were started in the North West. In 1995, zero. Here in Pendle the last council house was built over a decade ago. And it is not the local council to blame but the Government.”

“If housing association and new town dwellings are added to the council house numbers we find that, in the North West, 10,996 were started in 1979 and 4,652 in 1995. That is two homers started in 79 for every one now. These are shocking statistics given the extent of housing need in this area.”

The figures which have just been published by the Government reveal that only 84,000 new homes were started in Great Britain in the first six months of 1996. That figure includes the private sector as well as housing associations and councils. It compares with 95,000 during the same period in 1995 and 106,000 in 1994. Housing starts in June alone this year were 22 per cent down on June 1995.

The MP added: “Things are getting worse. And things were pretty bad already for people in our part of the world. Things are going from bad to worse.”

Note to Editors: The latest house building figures cover the first six months of 1996 and show a fall of 11 per cent on the previous year. They show -

• only 84,000 new homes were started in Great Britain in the first six months of 1996, compared with 95,000 in 1995 and 106,000 in 1994

• only 15,000 housing association starts were made, compared with 19,000 in 1995 and 24,000 in 1994
more follows

HOUSE BUILDING DOWN AGAIN

only 68,000 new private starts were made compared with 76,000 in 1994 and 82,000 in 1994

Far from showing any improvement, the situation is if anything getting worse. Starts in June 1996 were 22 per cent lower than in June 1995.

This latest news confirms that the Government's betrayal on housing is continuing. What makes it worse is that the situation even in 1995 was disastrous compared with the last year Labour was in office, in 1979. In 1995, there were just 1,858 housing starts in Great Britain made by councils and new towns. This compares with 64,794 housing starts by councils and new towns in 1979. In other words, for every 1 home started in 1995 under this Government, there were 35 in 1979 with Labour. In two areas last year - North West and London - not a single council house was started. The Government likes to claim that housing associations have made up the difference. But this isn't true. In 1995, there were 58,992 house starts made by councils, new towns and housing associations put together. This compares with over 80,000 in 1979 under the last Labour Government.

For Immediate Release. Number: 276/96. Monday 12 August 1996

£I/2 BILLION SQUANDERED ON RAIL PRIVATISATION says PRENTICE

The Government has just squandered £1/2 a billion on rail privatisation according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. "And this is at a time when the railway track and trains are falling to bits. Here in the North West we have to put up with rolling stock that should have been pensioned off years ago" says the MP.

The MP added: "The rest of us have to pick up the tab in extra costs for a poorer service and it sticks in my throat that so much public money has gone into the pockets of people hired to smooth the path of privatisation rather than on the trains and track."

"The Government has had to confess that they have paid out nearly half a billion in fees to companies to help them privatise the railways. They've squandered £453 million to promote rail privatisation which nobody wants. This huge sum of taxpayers' money has been paid out to lawyers, bankers and accountants. Not a penny of it has been invested in the railways. Yet passengers are crying out for investment in modern carriages, in electrification and re-signalling."

"£453 million would have paid for 37 new trains and kept people in work in York, in Derby and Doncaster. £453 million would have paid for half the cost of modernising the West Coast Main Line. It would have also provided jobs for engineering firms all over the country."

Note to Editors: The Government paid Lawyers £34.2m; bankers and accountants £17.5m; other consultants £45.2m. Railtrack spent £78m on privatisation and British Rail spent £278m. The total is £453,004,000.

For Immediate Release. Number: 277/96. Tuesday 13 August 1996

DRIVING TEST TAKES A WRONG TURN says MP

Learner drivers taking the new "theory driving test" will have to travel miles before their pen even touches paper says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says enraged constituents want the policy reversed. Under the new set up people living in Pendle may have to travel as far afield as Bolton, Preston or Bradford to take their written test on the highway code.

Speaking in his North East Lancashire constituency earlier today, the MP said: "The arrangements are absurd. Why on earth isn't it possible for the theory tests to be taken closer to home? I have been given no convincing explanation other than the usual one to save money. But what about the costs in time and inconvenience to my constituents who could, in some cases, face a round trip of 48 miles?"

"People living in West Craven, for example, have been assured they would be able to do their theory test at a place within a radius of 20 miles - yet the nearest designated towns are Preston (24), Bradford (28) or Bolton (30)!"

"The Driving Standards Agency needs to take a crash course in geography!"

Note to Editors: The letter from the DSA to the MP dated 5 August and his reply are enclosed.

For Immediate Release. Number: 278/96. Tuesday 13 August 1996

EARBY GO!

Special arrangements are being made at the Palace of Westminster to accommodate the 44 strong group of children and teachers from Earby County Primary who are dropping in to say hello on 28 August as part of a trip to London which aims to take in all the big sights.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who will be acting as guide says he is looking forward to the visit tremendously.

"Obviously 38 ten year olds will be a bit of a handful but I am sure I can count on the six teachers to help keep the children out of the speakers chair and off the throne!"

For Immediate Release. Number: 279/96. Tuesday 27 August 1996

PHOTOCALL: ST CLEMENTS CLOSE, PENDLE STREET, BARROWFORD. TODAY. 2pm TUESDAY 27 AUGUST.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting St Clements Court, Pendle Street, Barrowford at 2pm today (Tuesday) to meet the residents and staff. The MP will also be meeting Mr Steve Wood, The North West Regional Manager of Anchor.

The MP is particularly concerned about the impact of recent Government initiatives affecting elderly people in Pendle. The MP said: "Long term care is a big issue. People have a right to expect security and independence in later life. They have been let down by this Government."

For Immediate Release. Number: 280/96. Tuesday 27 August 1996

MP BACKS 'MANIFESTO FOR OLDER PEOPLE'

Older people have a right to security and independence in later life says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking earlier today to residents of St Clements Court in Barrowford, outlining his views on long term care and other issues of particular concern to older people.

The MP was also backing Anchor Trust's "Manifesto for Older People" which recommends a raft of policies designed to meet the aspirations of older people. In Pendle, 26% of voters are over retirement age (national average 24%) and 60% are over 40 (national average 58%).

After the meeting the MP said: "It is clearly the case that a very large number of older people feel uncertain about the future. Like the rest of us, they have seen big changes in community care and in the NHS. I was quizzed on a whole range of issues - from the crippling costs of residential care to the national lottery and how its proceeds are distributed."

"I was left in no doubt that older people value their independence above all and we need policies which will help them stay active and in their own homes with access to the care and support they need. Anchor Trust's Manifesto is a splendid document."

Note to Editors: Age Concern has just published details of a national Gallup survey on the views of older people on a range of issues. Here are the main findings:

Over three quarters (77%) said that the current state pension was too low. 61% said it should be raised even if it meant increasing taxes; 16% said it was too low but should not be increased if it meant raising taxes. Only 15% said the current state pension level was about right. Less than half a per cent said it was too high.

Half of all respondents thought that older people should be able to have a 'decent standard of living' on a mixture of private/occupational and state pensions. 44% said it should be possible on the state pension alone; this rose to 53% amongst pensioners.
'MANIFESTO FOR OLDER PEOPLE'

When asked which two areas they would prefer an extra penny in income tax to be spent on 61% said improved health care for all; 47% said education; 28% said reducing unemployment; 15% said pensions and 14% said the care needs of pensioners.

Only 8% of respondents thought that pensioners should have to sell their
homes to pay for long term care. | Over a quarter, 27% of the sample, thought that people should get free care regardless of their income or savings, either in their own home or in a residential or nursing home. This rose to 31% amongst pensioners.

Of those who said that everyone should get free care from the state, the majority (59%) said it should be paid for out of taxes. This was much more so for men (67%) than women (51%). Those aged 60+ were most likely to say it should be paid for out of taxes (68%). A third (33%) of those saying there should be free care for all said it should be paid for through a compulsory government savings scheme.

Just over half (53%) of respondents said everyone should receive some help from the state with some of the cost and only people on low incomes/savings should receive full help with the cost. Women (57%) were more likely to say this than men (50%).

Only 17% said that help with paying for care should be limited to people on low incomes.

- Over half of all respondents (58%) thought that the government should introduce age discrimination legislation.

Nearly three quarters of respondents (72%) agreed that government training schemes should be for people of all ages, and not mainly focused on younger people.

Only 15% thought that people in their 50s should be prepared to give up their jobs to make way for younger people.

Very few of respondents, only 9%, thought that where health services resources are limited pensioners should be a lower priority than younger people.

• 85 % thought that pensioners on low incomes should be guaranteed extra help with fuel bills in winter months; 82% thought that VAT on fuel should be abolished.

72% thought that pensioners should automatically get free or subsidised travel.

Women were more likely to think that pensioners should get concessions, with 74 % of women saying that pensioners should get free or subsidised travel, as opposed to 71% of men.

Survey details: Interviews were carried out between 24 - 30 April 1996 by the Gallup Organisation on behalf of Age Concern. The sample of 2,046 adults (18+) is representative,of the adult population of Great Britain, and is stratified by region and town size. Percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number, and consequently, do not always add up to 100% exactly.

For Immediate Release. Number: 281/96.Thurs 29 August 1996

EARBY KIDS GET THE RUN OF WESTMINSTER

A deserted Palace of Westminster opened its doors yesterday afternoon (Wednesday) to 44 children and teachers from Earby County Primary School, in London on a four day visit.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, got the Palace of Westminster opened up just for the Earby kids. It is closed to the public in the afternoons during the recess.

The MP said: “The children were magnificent. They were inquisitive and clearly enjoyed having the run of the place completely uninterrupted by others!”

The MP continued: “When I go round the building it is impossible not to sense the history of the place. I can point to all the grizzly spots where people were assassinated, tried, condemned to death and so on.”

“When I told the Earby kids, gathered in the ancient and historic Westminster Hall, that Oliver Cromwell’s head was stuck on a pole and left in the rafters for twenty years there was a chorus of very loud gasps. That sort of gruesome fact goes down a treat with ten year olds!”

For Immediate Release. Number: 282/96. Tues September 3 1996

LOCAL MP BACKS CRACKDOWN ON CAR TAX DODGERS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to crack down on car tax dodgers. Today, the Department of Transport unleashes a new blitz on the tax dodgers and Pendle’s MP says the move is long overdue.

The MP commented: “The North West has the highest percentage of unlicensed vehicles on the road of any region in England. Figures I released earlier this year showed a staggering 3.7% of all private and light goods vehicles are on the road without a tax disk. In the UK as a whole only Wales has a higher rate of tax dodgers at 4%.”

“Last March, I told a Commons Committee the revenue lost as a result of evasion is about £163m a year. As a proportion of all Vehicle Excise Duty revenue, the amount lost has risen from 3.5% in 1984 to 4.1% in 1994/5.”

“Incredibly, 371,000 motorcycles on the road are unlicensed. This is 34.9% of the total. £12m revenue is lost as a result. The Government really must get its act together.”

ends

Note to Editors: The percentage of unlicensed private and light goods vehicles in Yorkshire and Humberside is 3.0%

A Press Release from the Department of Transport embargoed til 3 September adds: Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside Police join forces with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency [DVLA] to launch a major crackdown against motor tax fiddlers.

Motorists throughout the North West who evade paying their motor tax are to be targetted in a month-long campaign starting on 3 September. Extensive publicity during the next two weeks is designed to:

• encourage all motorists to check that their vehicles are properly taxed and, if not, to relicense them immediately;

CAR TAX DODGERS

• warn evaders that, from 15 September, the police will be intensifying enforcement activity to ensure that vehicles are displaying current tax discs.

• Motorists found not displaying a current tax disc will be reported for prosecution. Police will also be looking out for road safety and motoring offences.

It is estimated that the loss of revenue from Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) was around £170 million in 1995/96.

During the last financial year (1995/96) over 495,000 evaders were successfully penalised, recovering some £51 million in fines and penalties.

Campaigns are a valuable addition to the day-to-day enforcement action of the police and the Department of Transport against motor tax cheats. They have proved extremely effective in encouraging people to relicense their vehicles; motorists who do must produce current insurance documents and, where necessary, a certificate of road worthiness (MoT certificate).

The campaigns also make a significant contribution to road safety: about a third of the reports arising from the campaigns involve other offences - including no MoT certificate, no insurance and defective tyres.

For Immediate Release. Number: 283/96. Tues September 3, 1996

DEADLINE NEARS FOR CASTLE CEMENT INQUIRY

The Public Inquiry into the burning of cemfuel by Castle Cement at Clitheroe will start on 12 November. A “pre-hearing meeting” will be held at 2pm on Monday 16 September in the Council Chamber at Clitheroe.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “I hope everyone who is at all concerned about the burning of this controversial waste product will make their views known to the Inquiry Inspector. There has been a tremendous campaign by local people over in Clitheroe and in the

surrounding villages and although the area is outside my own constituency there are many people here in Pendle who are deeply concerned about the issue."

"As Chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee I have a clear interest in the issue - especially when it is on my own doorstep."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP has had a long running involvement in the Cemfuel issue. His Commons debate on 20 March sparked renewed interest in the long running saga. It was covered in John Waite's BBC's award winning "Face the Facts" programme on 29th May this year. On 9 May, the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, agreed that the appeal by Castle Cement against conditions imposed by the Environment Agency on the operation of the plant at Clitheroe would be held in public.

For Immediate Release. Number: 284/96. Wednesday 4 Sept 1996

MP FLIES IN TO FARNBOROUGH

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting Farborough air show this Thursday (5 September) to give support to the Lancashire aerospace consortium who will be displaying their wares at stands at the showcase event.

The MP said: "I enjoy visiting Farnborough. It is a good opportunity to meet the key players in the industry and to promote the firms here in Lancashire. Aerospace is big business which relies on leading edge technology and I want the North West to be in there at the forefront of new developments. New orders mean more jobs."

"Yesterday's announcement on Airbus was just the tonic we need. Airbus is vital to the industry's future and the company is now running neck and neck with Boeing, the industry leader."

Note to Editors: The European Airbus programme received a £1 billion boost yesterday with the announcement at Farnborough of big aircraft orders worth more than £720 million. British Aerospace has a 20% stake in Airbus. Both Airbus and Boeing are competing head-on to produce super jumbo aircraft.

The MP is planning a meeting of shadow cabinet members and representatives the Lancashire's aerospace firms in the autumn.

For Immediate Release. Number: 285/96. Tues, September 3 1996

NEW THREAT TO NURSERY PLACES

“Existing nursery places here in Pendle are at risk by the Government's new voucher scheme" says local MP Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: “A leaked Government report for the Department for Education and Employment shows that nursery places here in Pendle are being put at risk by the Government's scheme for nursery vouchers.”

“We already have a shortage of places in West Craven. Yet the report admits that existing nursery places provided by education authorities could be lost with no guarantee that private nurseries will make up the difference.”

“Nursery education is vital for all our children. This Government has no right to put it at risk. But that's what they are doing. Parents want a nursery place for every 4 year old and and that's what Labour will provide - in every part of Pendle.”

Note to Editors: A leaked Department for Education and Employment Report admits that the Government's nursery voucher scheme may create "losers" - leading to fewer nursery places in some parts of the country. Nursery places provided by education authorities could be reduced with no guarantee that the private and voluntary sectors will be able to step in to provide more.

The DFEE document, prepared as part of negotiations over local government grant levels, admits the voucher scheme -

• would lead to cuts in existing nursery places in some areas

• could reduce the value of vouchers to 71 local education authorities below the level promised by Ministers

• would cost an extra £20 million just in paperwork

Despite all John Major's promises, there is no cast iron commitment to nursery

THREAT TO NURSERY PLACES

places for all -

• the voucher offers no guarantee of a place

• there are minimal guarantees of quality in the private sector

• areas with the best record for nurseries (mainly Labour councils)will have as much as 75% of their under-fives funding diverted into the voucher scheme, putting current provision at risk

• with no money available to fund staff training, new premises or equipment, expansion in the voluntary and private sectors has so far been negligible

LABOUR'S POLICY

Labour will -

• guarantee 4 years old a year's pre-school education and set targets to extend that entitlement to 3 year olds get each local education authority to draw up a strategy in partnership with the private , and voluntary sectors, setting targets to extend places to all 3 and 4 year olds

For Immediate Release. Number: 287/96. Wednesday 4 Sept 1996

BARLICK'S LEARNER DRIVERS TOLD TO FLY NOT DRIVE

Barlick's learner drivers will have to travel miles to take their new theory driving tests - because the Driving Standards Agency calculates distances as the crow flies and not by road miles. The revelation, in a letter from the agency's chief executive, Bernard Herdan, has infuriated local MP, Gordon Prentice who is backing Barlick's L plate drivers. The MP has pledged to raise the issue with Ministers to get the ruling changed.

Under the new arrangements people living in Pendle may have to travel as far afield as Bolton, Preston or Bradford to take their written test on the highway code. Early last month the MP pressed the agency to re-think the new policy. "People living in West Craven, for example, have been assured they would be able to do their theory test at a place within a radius of 20 miles - yet the nearest designated towns are Preston (24), Bradford (28) or Bolton (30). Now I am told the distances are to be calculated as the crow flies and not by road and, miraculously, Bradford qualifies!"

“This is absurd. My constituents are not going to ruffle their feathers and fly to the test centres. The technology already exists to calculate the distance between one address in the UK and another.”

Note to Editors: The following letter of 29 August was sent to the MP by the agency’s Chief Executive:

“Thank you for your letter of 13 August regarding the arrangements for the theory test for your constituents in the district of Pendle. You raise a number of points which I will answer in turn.

The criteria for locating a network of centres was defined in my letter of 5 August. You state that the driving theory test centre in Bradford lies 28 miles from Barnoldswick, however, this is the total mileage to Bradford by road. We have re-checked and confirmed that Barnoldswick is within a 20 mile radius of the theory test centre located at Bradford. The distances for the centres have been measured "as the crow flies" as it would not be feasible to estimate the distance by road for all possible locations.
more follows:

BARLICK’S LEARNER DRIVERS TOLD TO FLY NOT DRIVE

With regard to the district of Craven, which has a population density of 43 persons per square kilometre, the specification for the tendering exercise required that in sparsely populated areas with a population less than 100 persons per kilometre, theory test centres should be located within a 40 mile radius.

You suggest that it must be possible to take the theory test nearer to the practical test centres. As explained in my previous letter of 5 August, requirements for siting theory test centres are different from those for the practical test centres. Increasing the number of theory test centres to reflect the network of practical centres would increase the cost of the service which would unfortunately have to be borne by all candidates in the form of an increased fee.

Although I note your concerns, in the absence of a robust case demonstrating that the circumstances of Pendle are special in relation to other districts of equivalent population density, my view remains that the plans for theory test centres in the area reflect a realistic balance between costs, travelling distances and the frequency with which tests will be available.

For Immediate Release. Number: 288/96. Wed 4 September 1996

BARLICK LABOUR'S GARDEN PARTY A BIG SUCCESS

The Barnoldswick Labour Party's Garden Party was a huge success according to local MP Gordon Prentice. Sunday's social and fund raising event at the Hey Farm home of Bert and Betty Lewis on Manchester Road attracted over a hundred supporters and well-wishers in the course of the afternoon.

Pendle's MP, who lives in the town, opened the Garden Party with an election "call to arms".

He said: "The Conservatives are spending money on their £10 million "devil's eyes" poster campaign as if there is no tomorrow. For a Party that was deemed to be almost bankrupt just over a year ago they are now miraculously awash with cash hiring every billboard they can lay their hands on."

"Britain wants a clean election campaign. It won't get it from the Tories but it will get it from Labour, going out into the country and fighting on the real issues. The Conservatives have already given us a taste of the forthcoming election campaign. It will be negative and dirty campaign. The Prime Minister must either disown that campaign or take responsibility for it."

Note to Editors: The latest poster in the Tories' controversial "demon eyes" advertising campaign is expected to be unveiled by party chairman Dr Brian Mawhinney later this week. The campaign sparked controversy when the Advertising Standards Authority received complaints about the way in which the first poster portrayed the church-going Labour leader.

For Immediate Release. Number: 289/96. Wednesday 4 Sept 1996

MP STEPS OUT ON THE ROAD TO THE MANIFESTO

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be leading a discussion of Labour Party members this Friday on the Road to the Manifesto - the new ground breaking policy document which spells out Labour's early pledges for action in Government.

The meeting, in Nelson's Silverman Hall, is one of a number being addressed by Pendle's MP.

Gordon Prentice said: “We are months away from a General Election. Months from a historic choice which will decide the country's direction as we enter a new Millennium. The document New Labour, New Life for Britain will form the basis of the manifesto on which we will fight that election when it comes. It lays new Labour's foundations for the new Britain we seek to build ... In every single area of policy we now set out both a vision and clear, direct and practical proposals.”

Note to Editors: Labour pledges to:

• Set tough rules for government spending and borrowing; ensure low inflation; strengthen the economy so that interest rates are as low as possible. A Labour government will ensure low inflation and will reject short-term quick fixes. We will set a target for low and stable inflation. We are committed to sound and stable public finances over the economic cycle meeting the Golden Rule of borrowing only to invest. And over the economic cycle we are committed to keeping the overall level of government borrowing at a stable and prudent level. Three and a half years after the recession officially ended, Britain still has over two million people unemployed, higher than expected borrowing, inflation which remains outside the Government's target band and - most worryingly for our future - critically low levels of investment. Under the Tories Britain has fallen from 13th to 18th place in the world prosperity league. The state of the economy today reflects seventeen years of Tory economic mismanagement.

• Get 250,000 under-25 year-olds off benefit and into work by using money from a windfall levy on the privatised utilities. Labour's welfare to work programme offers young people who have been out of work for more than six months a choice of four options - a job with training, voluntary work with training,
full-time study,work on an environmental taskforce with training.

Youth unemployment in the UK is almost double that in Germany. Currently some 265,000 young people have been unemployed for over six months, and nearly 600,000 have no education, training or work. Failure to tackle this means continuing with high social security bills, social discontent and high rats of crime amongst young people.

• Cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step by releasing El 00 million saved from NHS red tape. Labour will also restore the freedom of all GPs to refer their patients to wherever they think fit, ending the bureaucratic system of extra contractual referrals and saving more than £20 million. Requiring a reduction in management costs in all health authorities will free at least £80 million. Over a million people are waiting for NHS treatment; nearly 250,000

have waited for over 6 months. £1.5 bn extra is wasted administering the Tory internal market that's £4 million every day.

• Cut class sizes to 30 or under for 5,6, and 7 year olds by using money saved from the assisted places scheme. The National Foundation for Education Research calculated that the pledge would cost £60 million a year in England, which Labour will pay for by phasing out the Assisted Places Scheme. We have also consistently stated that this must be linked to improvements in the quality of teaching in state schools.

Ofsted say "Small class sizes are of benefit in the early years of primary education". Senior academics agree. Research in the US showed significant improvement as a result of small classes - especially for socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority pupils. But Ministers consistently refuse to accept any link between performance and class sizes. In January 1996 1.3 million primary school pupils were in classes of 31 or more - 125,000 more than last year.

• Create fast-track punishment of young offenders by halving the time from arrest to sentencing. Labour pledges to deal with persistent offenders from arrest to sentence by introducing a fast track system for persistent offenders, replacing cautioning with a final warning system which triggers intervention by youth offender teams, and more effective use of secure accommodation for persistent young offenders. Youth crime is increasing. Much of it is committed by a hard core of persistent offenders. Cautioning is not working.

For Immediate Release. Number: 290/96. Wednesday 4 Sept 1996

GP VISITS GPs

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, dropped into the doctors' surgery in Earby this morning for an 8.30am consultation with the town's GPs. He says his meetings with local doctors give him a fresh insight into the problems and challenges facing the NHS.

The MP has been asking local doctors for their views on primary care and how it could be developed under a Labour Government.

After the visit the MP said: "The Earby practice is friendly and hugely popular - and with good reason. I had the opportunity to speak at length with Dr Paul Miller and his colleagues although 8.30 in the morning is not usually my best time! I was very impressed by the commitment and dedication of all those working there."

“The practice area is very extensive and covers West Craven, Foulridge up to Colne and goes over the border into Yorkshire.”

“Under Labour’s health plans, published last summer, there will be a new and bigger role for the family doctor in health care and an end to two tier waiting lists for hospital treatment. GPs will have the right to decisde where to send their patients to hospital.”

The MP added: “We want minimum bureaucracy and form filling. And we wanbt all GPs to have a say in shaping local health strategies.”

For Immediate Release. Number: 291/96. Wed 4 September 1996

MP SLATES 22 VAT INCREASES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has launched a blistering attack on “Tory tax by stealth”. He says the Government has sneaked through tax rises amounting to millions of pounds leaving people none the wiser.

Speaking to a meeting of Labour Party members in Barrowford last night, the MP said: “At the last election the Tories launched a massive campaign of orchestrated lies about Labour’s tax plans. The Tories repeatedly denied they had plans to widen the scope of VAT. Indeed, John Major told us “I have made it clear we have no plans to widen the scope of VAT” (27 March 1992).

“This was light years away from reality. We have now calculated the cost and VAT and the other indirect taxes now take over 22 pence for every pound of take home pay for a typical family. (The rate is higher then 17.5% because of excise duties.) Many of these tax increases have been made sneakily though the back door without any budget announcements.”

The MP continued: “Indirect taxes such as VAT are unfair end impose a higher tax rate on the poor than the better off. The poorest fifth pay out 30% of their take home pay in indirect taxes while the richest fifth pay out just 15%. In 1979 the poorest 5th of households paid a lower rate of tax at 15% of their gross income than the richest fifth, who paid 38% of their gross income. Astonishingly, by 1994/5 the poorest 5th paid a higher rate of tax than the richest fifth - 40% of their gross income compared to 36%.”

Note to Editors: The list of VAT extensions includes:

1. Supplies of stationery to charities

2.Certain asthma and hay fever related products such as vacuum cleaners and air fresheners previously zero rated.

3. A limit on reclaiming VAT, of three years, was introduced from July. The Health

MP SLATES 22 VAT INCREASES

Service, which has just introduced new accounting practices, may lose millions from this tax hike.

4. Incontinence products such as incontinence pads

5. Factor 8, a medical product used in the treatment of haemophilia

6. Fair ground and amusement park rides such as roller coasters

7. Hot water for commercial use

8. Certain trading stamps end vouchers

9. Charity advertising

10. Only increasing the VAT threshold by half the rate of inflation in the last budget so that more businesses were brought in to the VAT net (increased from £46,000 to only £47,000)

11.Higher frequency of payment by business raising £600 million in 1996/7.

12. Increase of VAT on private usage of company cars

13.Tougher penalties for errors in calculating VAT returns in 1993 budget and again in 1995 budget

14 On the servicing of cash point machines

15. On fuel

16. Entertainment on passenger services, recreational activity and car parking at airports where they were previously deemed to be transport and therefore zero rated.

17. Certain precious metals.

18. Iced tea

19. Connection charges for caravans

20. Certain liabilities on mobile homes

21. On beverages such as orange juice

22. Investment advisory services.

For Immediate Release. No 293/96 Wed 11 September 1996

PENDLE'S JOBLESS UP AGAIN

The number of people out of work in Pendle and claiming benefit rose last month to 2,171 from 2,089 in July. The unemployment rate rose to 6.1% from 5.9%. The figures show 1,659 men are out of work (7.7%) and 512 women (3.7%). 177 vacancies were notified to the Jobcentre in Colne and 332 in Nelson.

Nationally, unemployment fell in August for the sixth month running, to its lowest level since March 1991. In the North West 232,900 are out of work - down 1,200 on July. This represents 8.2% of the workforce.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "It is more disappointing news here in Pendle where unemployment has cost no less than £139,413,000 since the last General Election when John Major inherited a jobless figure of 1,708 from his predecessor. After almost five years we aren't even back where we started from."

"So far as the national picture is concerned the figures bear little relation to the true numbers out of work. On today's figure, unemployment, seasonally adjusted, fell by 180,000 in the year to August. But today's figures showed the number of people in work had increased by only 93,000 during the year. This means almost half of those leaving the register were not going into jobs."

For Immediate Release. No 294/96 Tues 10 September 1996

CHANCE TO AIR YOUR VIEWS ON CASTLE CEMENT

The public inquiry into the controversial use of the waste derived fuel "cemfuel" by Castle Cement at its plant in Clitheroe is to take place on 12 November.

But next week people with something to say about the issue will get an opportunity to set out their concerns at a "pre-meeting" hearing on Monday 16 September at 2pm in the town's Council Chamber.

The pre-hearing is designed to clarify the main issues in dispute and focus the attention of the November inquiry on the key points.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Clearly, this is an opportunity for all those concerned about the burning of this fuel to have their say. I shall be following events very closely."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP successfully pressed for a public inquiry after he secured a Commons debate on the issue earlier this year. The MP is chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee.

For Immediate Release. No 295/96 Wed 11 September 1996

ACCIDENT VICTIMS SPEAK OUT

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing Ministers to come clean on the Government's plans to reform the compensation recovery scheme. He says he is dealing with over twenty cases involving constituents who have lost out. In July he appealed to local accident victims to step forward and identify themselves.

The MP accused the Government of robbing personal injury victims of millions of pounds every year by clawing back state benefits paid to them. He says people suffering from a major disability caused by injury were seeing their compensation vanish into the Treasury coffers.

Speaking in his constituency earlier today the MP said: “I must have had about 20 people contact me who were alerted by the earlier press coverage. They have all suffered from a disabling accident and have lost thousands of pounds when their compensation was grabbed by the Government. Some of the people I've spoken to have lost a small fortune. When Parliament returns after the recess this issue will be at the top of my agenda. People have been treated disgracefully."

Note to Editors: Nationally, the total amount recovered during 1995/6 was £135.1 million and if the current trend continues the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison, estimates this year it will be in the region of £145m. The highest amount clawed back from a victim of a personal injury - a neck injury - was £93,950. The Social Security Select Committee produced a report on compensation recovery exactly a year ago. The Committee recommended that

responsibility for paying back money to the Government should lie with the insurance companies rather than the victim of the accident or disease.

For Immediate Release. No 296/96 Tues 10 September 1996

TORY POSTERS MAKE MP SEE RED

The Conservative poster blitz on Pendle has unleashed a storm of indignation from the area's Labour MP, Gordon Prentice. "First of all we had the farcical "It Hurt but it Worked". Then along came the infamous "devil's eyes". Now, directly opposite the Town Hall in Nelson, is their latest offering "New Labour New Taxes".

"The Tories are up to their old tricks again. How they have the brass neck to put up these posters beats me. The posters come from a Party that's made the typical family pay an extra £2,000 in tax. The tax burden is already far too high for ordinary families."

"We have had 22 tax rises since 1992 when they said they would cut taxes. Crime has doubled. The number of people on benefit has doubled. Britain has fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league. There are 50,000 fewer nurses and 20,000 more managers in the NHS. These are the facts about this Government's record."

"I will, however, swallow my indignation if the Conservatives tell us who is paying for this poster blitz across the nation. Who on earth is bankrolling the Tories? In a matter of months we have seen the Conservatives go from a £16m debt to accruing a £10m war chest to spend on their negative advertising. The objective of their advertising campaign is to scare voters away from Labour and to firm up their core support. We are determined to challenge their lies."

The MP added: "The Labour Party has set up a "Tory Poster Watch". We want to know the location and type of posters put up nationwide." The MP explained: "This will allow allow us to cost the Conservative advertising campaign. Then we shall ask them where the money comes from. And we shall go on asking until we get an answer."

Note to Editors: In June 1991, the Conservatives launched their controversial £1 million poster campaign "Labour Going for Broke". Posters appeared in selected sites across Pendle. In January 1992, the notorious "Labour Tax Bombshell" posters appeared in Pendle that claimed a Labour Government would cost people an extra £1,000 a year in tax. At the time, Prentice denounced it as a complete invention.

Speaking to a meeting of pensioners in Colne that same month he predicted VAT would rise to 22% if the Conservatives won another term. Today, as Pendle's MP, he admits he was wrong about that. "Mind you, I didn't predict they would put VAT on fuel either."

CONSERVATIVE ELECTION CAMPAIGN BUDGET,
AS AT 20TH MAY, 1996

Life's Better/ You know it hurt (already spent)	£685,791
Party Political Broadcast "Money"	£40,000
Posters, 1 -14th July, New Labour New Danger''	£240,550
Posters, 15-31st July, 'Danger 1.....	£311,122
Posters, 1-14th. July Danger 2.....	£311,249
Posters, 15-30th August, Danger 3	£296,310
Posters, 1-14th September, 'Danger 4'	£388,450
Posters, 15-30th September, 'Danger 5'	£354,004
July-September poster production/despatch	£170,000
PPB September, 'NLND'	£40,000
PPB October, 'Life's Better'	£40,000
Posters, January	£255,255
Posters, February	£289,000
Posters, 1-15th March	£164,433
Jan-March poster production/despatch	£50,000
PPB January	£40,000
PPB February	£40,000
GE posters, 16-30th March	£573,750
GE posters, April.....	£2,945,000
GE poster production/despatch	£150,000
PPBs	£100,000
Agency Fee, June - May	£1,020,000
NET TOTAL	£8,504,914
VAT @ 17.5%	£1,488,359
GROSS TOTAL	£9,993,273

For Immediate Release. No 302/96 Tues 10 September 1996

HIGHERFORD CHAPEL OPENS FOR BUSINESS - IN JAPAN

Pendle's Higherford Methodist Chapel, demolished in the 1980s, has officially opened for business in Tokyo. The chapel, rebuilt stone by stone in a suburb of the Japanese capital, is now part of a new hotel complex and will be used for wedding ceremonies.

Last May local MP, Gordon Prentice, met the new owner Mr Takeuchi at the Commons and gave him and his party afternoon tea. The hotelier

asked the MP if he could arrange for the British ambassador to be at this month's opening ceremony.

The MP said: "I got in touch with our Embassy in Tokyo and they were very happy to help. But unfortunately the Foreign Secretary was in Tokyo last week and the ambassador had to accompany him on his official calls. However, he arranged for the Embassy First Secretary to go along in his place and show the flag."

The MP added: "I am sure some of the people who stay at the hotel in Japan will want to visit the site of the Chapel's earlier existence as a place of worship. I am praying it boosts Pendle's tourism."

For Immediate Release. No 298/96 Wed 11 September 1996

MP SLATES LIBERALS ON FIRE COVER

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has slammed Pendle's Liberal Democrats for refusing to call on the Home Secretary to review the national minimum standards of fire cover which were originally set in 1958. Last week, the Liberal controlled council voted down a motion put by Labour Group Leader Carol Hopkins calling for an early review of the standards which she says are out of date and inadequate. The Liberal Democrats claimed the Labour move would detract from the united response to the County Council.

The MP's broadside against Pendle Council comes days after the 31 August deadline for comments on the consultation Paper produced by the County's Chief Fire Office, J.G. Russel. The MP said: "I am very disappointed in our local Liberals. Why on earth couldn't the council urge the Home Secretary to review the national standards?"

"No-one in Pendle wants to see any change to the existing fire cover in this area and I simply do not believe the County would dream of axing two fire engines in Barlick and Colne to save around £20,000 in a service that costs well over £30m a year to run. The real villain of the piece is the Home Secretary who refuses to give an undertaking to review these antiquated fire standards. I am puzzled as to why our Liberal Democrats refuse to make common cause against the Government. Every comment they make is directed at the County as if Lancashire is straining at the leash to make deep cuts in our fire cover. In fact, the Chief Fire Officer's consultation paper which fanned the flames was informed by these out-of-date Home Office minimum standards. To pretend therefore the matter has nothing to do with central government is plainly absurd."

Note 1 to Editors: The consultation concluded on August 31. A working party from the County's Fire Protection Committee will consider the response to the consultation on 10 October. The County's Fire Committee will again look at the review of fire cover at its Budget meeting on 31 October.

Note 2 to Editors: The MP received the following letter dated 2 September from Home Office Minister, Baroness Blatch, who has direct responsibility for the fire service. "Thank you for your letter of 30 July to the Home Secretary about Lancashire Fire Brigade and the standards of fire cover.

It is vitally important that local communities are served by an effective and efficient fire service. All fire authorities have a statutory duty to provide an efficient fire service in their area in practice this is generally interpreted as a brigade which can meet the nationally recommended standards of fire cover. The attached note gives a brief outline of the existing standards. It is for fire authorities to determine locally whether the level of response to an incident should be at or above the nationally recommended standards. I should point out that the existing standards are not just recommended standards they have been carefully considered and agreed by the fire service organisations represented on the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council.

You ask if there are any plans to review the standards of fire cover. In its report "In *the line of fire",* published in February 1995, the Audit Commission recommended that there should be another review of the levels of fire cover. It recognised, however, that the standards could not be replaced in the short-term. Identifying a replacement would require careful consideration and have to be based on extensive research. This work is being taken forward by a Joint Committee of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council.

Statutory responsibility for the provision of an efficient fire service rests with the individual fire authorities. It is essentially a matter for the fire authority to decide how much to spend on its fire brigade in order to comply with its legal obligations. There are three underlying issues in relation to fire service funding - the total public expenditure provision for local government, how it is distributed in terms of Standard Spending Assessments among local authorities and the criteria for council tax capping. For England as a whole, the fire service element of Standard Spending Assessment has been increased by £17 million (1. 5%) for 1996-97, comprising £14 million towards the cost of firefighters' pensions and £3 million for training.

The fire service element of Standard Spending Assessment is distributed to fire authorities by means of a formula, which takes into account a number of factors, including population, population density, certain special service calls (road traffic, rail and air accidents, spills and leaks) and the number of fire and false alarm calls. The formula is looked at each year and local authority representatives play a full part in that review. In line with recommendations by the Audit Commission, the formula was adjusted for 1996-97 to include factors for firefighters' pensions and fire safety enforcement and fire safety education.

As a result of updating of the factors in the formula and the inclusion of the new elements, the fire service element of Lancashire's Standard Spending Assessment was increased by £0.6 million in 1996-97 . However, as a shire county, Lancashire is in a position to decide its priorities for spending across all its services, bearing in mind its statutory and other responsibilities. Overall, Lancashire's Standard Spending Assessment for 1996/97 has increased by £26.4 million compared with 1995-96 on a like-for-like basis and under the capping criteria it was able to set a budget for 1996-97 up to £28.9 million more than in 1995-96.

It is true to say that the Fire Service is being asked to make efficiency savings. But so is virtually every other public service. It is essential that we ensure that the taxpayer gets the best value for money. The Audit Commission itself has concluded that:

"There are local opportunities that can be taken now within the current framework. The locally achievable savings identified by this study are £67 million a year. This represents 5% of the total expenditure on the fire service...~ (Value for Money in the Fire Service: the National Picture, 1995).

I would stress that the Audit Commission is totally independent and has an excellent track record in this area. Moreover in its Report the Audit Commission highlights specific areas in which efficiency savings can be made, including:

"Reducing sickness rates in all brigades to the level of the lower quartile would save £17 million a year nationally" (ibid, para 81);

"Bringing [the level of leave in all] brigades down to the level of the lower quartile would lead to savings of £8 million per year" (ibid, para 84); and

"Moving all brigades [management costs] to the performance of the most efficient quarter would save some £29 million a year nationally" (para 97).

I am aware that Lancashire has been consulting about the recommendations of a review of fire cover, including the possible removal of a retained pumping appliance from both Barnoldswick and Colne fire stations. Any fire authority wishing to reduce the operational capability of its brigade must, under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, seek the approval of the Home Secretary. He will grant approval only where he is satisfied that: •the proposals have been sufficiently widely publicised, in sufficient detail and with adequate time, to enable any interested party to make representations; •the representations have been considered by the authority; and that •after taking advice from HM Inspectorate of Fire Services, the recommended fire cover standards will be maintained.

I can assure you that the Home Secretary will take account of representations received should the Authority decide to make a section 19 application."

Note 3 to Editors: The following note was sent to the MP as an annex to the above letter from Baroness Blatch

STANDARDS OF FIRE COVER: The main duties of fire authorities are set out in Section 1 of the Fire Services Act 1947 and include the requirement to secure the services for their area of such a fire brigade and such equipment as may be necessary to meet efficiently all "normal requirements". This has been interpreted by the Home Departments and fire authorities in terms of the nationally recommended standards of fire cover.

2. The national standards rest on four main standards of service, according to the risk category into which an area has been placed. This system of risk is based on the characteristics of the buildings and property in the area and assumes for each category that a predetermined number of firefighting appliances will attend within predetermined times:

Risk Category	Type of area normally served	First attendance (no of appliances)	Recommend -ed time limit for attendance (minutes)		
			1st	2nd	3rd
A	Large cities and towns	3	5	5	8
B	Large cities and towns	2	5	8	-
C	Suburbs of large towns and built up areas of	1	8-10	-	-

3. The standards dictate only the initial response to any fire in terms of weight and speed of attack: the officer in command at an incident may at any time request additional firefighting resources. Fire authorities may decide, and often do in the case of property fires in areas of C and D risk, to exceed the national standards. In addition to the risk categories above, individual sets of premises or areas may be designated as "special risks". These will normally command an initial weight (but not speed) of response above that for the surrounding area. Areas may also be classified as "remote rural" if they are isolated from centres of population and contain few buildings.

4. **The present standards were originally set in 1958.** They were reviewed in 1985 by a Joint Committee on Standards of Fire Cover for the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils for England and Wales and Scotland. The Committee recommended that there should be no change in the existing standards. Following the review, all fire authorities in Great Britain were invited to review their risk categorisation and the resources necessary to comply with the national standards. Each brigade is also inspected annually by HM Inspectorate of Fire Services. The Inspectorate has a specific remit to look at resource allocation and to identify over- and under-provision relative to the national standards.

For Immediate Release. No 299/96 Wed 11 September 1996

EMPTY SHOPS IN BARLICK

The alarming increase in the number of empty shops in Barnoldswick and their impact on the town has hit the headlines again. Town Crier columnist Graham Smith last week railed against the Business Rate (National Non Domestic Rate) which, he claims, is forcing local shops out of business. He called on local MP Gordon Prentice - who lives in the town - to make common cause with Pendle's Liberal controlled council in an effort to get the system changed.

The MP observed: "I have repeatedly pressed Ministers to look at the appalling affect of the Business Rate on small towns such as Barlick but it is like pushing a boulder uphill. The business rate has been the death knell for many small businesses. No distinction is made between high volume trading such as McDonalds and something like a craft shop."

The MP contacted Pendle Council two months ago following a steady stream of complaints about empty shops. The MP said: "I wanted to know what use was being made of the Council's powers (under section

49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988) to reduce or remit rates for struggling businesses. The Chief Executive told me the Council has considered only two formal applications for relief since the start of the new system of Business Rates six years ago and turned both of them down."

"Clearly, the existence of the s49 powers needs to be more widely publicised by the Council. If people need help - and believe they may qualify - they should contact the council without delay."

Note to Editors: Pendle's Chief Executive, Stephen Barnes, told the MP in a letter dated 12 August 1996: "The Council has considered applications under the Section 49 powers but has not yet allowed any reductions. Over the six
years of the NNDR regime there have been a small number of enquiries and only two formal applications. There are two major problems in granting such reductions:

(a) the definition "the interest of local taxpayers" has never been clearly explained and is interpreted by most local authorities as being a rates relief which will have a significant effect on the taxpayers in the Borough or a part of the Borough. Examples of sole village shops or post offices are probably the best example of the type of business which may meet the criteria.

There are few businesses in a town the size of Barnoldswick which are likely to meet the criteria because there tends to be other similar businesses in easy reach of the taxpayers which will supply the needs of the public.

(b) Establishing hardship is also difficult for businesses which have been set up to make a profit. Each application has to be considered on its own merits and there can be no blanket acceptance of 'loss making' as a definition of hardship. I understand that the hardship powers are not used widely throughout the Country and this has prompted the Government to consider introducing new schemes of relief for village shops and post offices.

You will appreciate that the Council have to directly fund part of the relief which will further increase the council tax. The Government have recently relaxed the capping rules in relation to General Fund contributions to the NNDR scheme but such exemption is still based on historic data."

Note 2 to Editors: Councils have powers to give hardship relief to mitigate the impact of the business rates. Section 49 of the Local

Government Finance Act 1988 enables local authorities to reduce or remit rates for any ratepayer, including businesses, where two conditions are satisfied: •would the ratepayer sustain hardship if relief was not given? •is it reasonable to give relief, taking into account the interests of local taxpayers? (75% of the cost of giving relief is met by the Government, but the other 25% must be met locally).

Last November Environment Secretary John Gummer announced that local authorities' contribution to hardship relief would not in future count towards their capping totals. This means that authorities spending at their capping limits will not have to divert funds from other spending commitments in order to give relief; the change was intended to encourage them to give more relief where businesses face difficulties. The Government has proposed Rate Relief for Village Shops which would give mandatory 50% rates relief for certain general stores and post offices in villages. Authorities would be free to top up the relief given on a discretionary basis.

For Immediate Release. No 300/96 Thurs 12 September 1996

MP SPELLS OUT HOME TRUTHS

The Government is trying to talk up the housing market as a way of diverting attention from its treatment of houseowners in the past says local MP Gordon Prentice.

The MP's Pendle constituency has one of the highest rates of home ownership in the country. 86% of the housing stock is private (75% for the North West Region and 76% for England). And in Pendle's private sector 92% is owner occupied (87% North West and 84% England) and 8% rented (13% NW and 16% England).

Speaking earlier this week to a meeting of Labour supporters, the MP said: "One thousand families very week are having their homes repossessed. 325,340 properties have been repossessed since John Major became Prime Minister in 1990. Over 500,000 families are still in negative equity, trapped in homes worth less than they paid for them. At the height of the negative equity crisis, over one million were in negative equity."

"Last year, there were just 1,858 housing starts in Great Britain made by councils compared with 64,794 housing starts in 1979. In other words, for every 1 home started in 1995 under the Tories, there were 35 in 1979 with Labour. And the situation is getting worse, not better."

"People in Pendle aren't fools. They know this Government has betrayed homeowners. I want to see a new housebuilding programme to provide new homes and create jobs in the building and building supplies industries."

For Immediate Release. No 302/96 Wed 18 September 1996

MP SLAMS GOVERNMENT "FOR HITTING THE NORTH WEST WHERE IT HURTS"

The twenty two tax rises introduced since 1993 - even with the one penny tax cut announced last year - are costing a typical family in the North West a staggering £666.74p more in tax according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in his constituency earlier today, the MP claimed 64,000 homes in the North West are trapped in negative equity. "It is a catalogue of disaster for the whole region he said. "Over one million people in the North West have experienced at least one spell of unemployment since the last General Election in 1992. And the price of an average home here in the North West has fallen by more than £7,500 since John Major became Prime Minster. According to the Halifax Building Society, the average house price has plummeted from £59,511 in November 1990 to £51,957 in the last quarter of 1995."

"According to their own statistics (regional accounts from Economic Trends - December 1995) from 1979 to 1993 manufacturing investment fell by 19%. And the official Labour Force Survey reveals that more than one in five households (415,000 homes) has no adult in employment."

"It is a shocking mismanagement of the nation's affairs" said the MP.

For Immediate Release. No 303/96 Wed 18 September 1996

LABOUR TACKLES POLITICAL DISAFFECTION AMONG YOUNG

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice today condemned the Government's neglect of young people - and highlighted proposals by Labour to tackle disaffection among the young. His comments come as students in colleges and universities prepare for the new academic term in October.

Recent research has found that only two in five young people say they are likely to vote in the next election.

The MP said: "Political disaffection among young people in Britain has reached alarming dimensions. But who can blame them? The government has consistently ignored the needs and aspirations of young people. It has saddled them with mass unemployment, wide scale job insecurity and inadequate training."

"It has failed completely to involve them in the democratic process - even key decision-making bodies dealing with areas of greatest interest to the young. None of the 11 members of the national Sports Council are under 30. Their average age is over 50. And research by MORI suggests there are no regional Arts Board members in their 20s. In fact, it seems the average age is over 50! And there are next to no young people on the boards of the 81 Training and Enterprise Councils."

"We need to do a lot more to encourage young people to take a greater interest in politics and civic life."

Note to Editors: Labour has introduced a range of measures to tackle the disaffection of young people and try to encourage them to play a bigger part in making decisions that affect their lives.

The new measures include:

• A new membership rate for the Labour Party of £1 a year for under-21s - or £3 for four years.

• A hotline for young people who have queries about Labour or about how to register to vote (telephone number 0171 277 3419).

• A network of young Labour councillors who will work to encourage young people to stand in local authority elections in future.

• Improved communication techniques - providing information on Labour policy in forms more relevant to young people, such the internet and CD-Rom.

Labour's five early pledges to young people are to get 250,000 young people off benefit and into work; replace the failed youth training scheme with a new high-quality Target 2000; ensure that all 16- and 17-year-olds in work get training; give more young people the chance of learning by relaxing the 16 hour rule; and give more people the

opportunity to work in non-profit voluntary sector jobs or help clean up our environment as part of our environment task force.

Labour's main site address on the internet is:
http://www.poptel.org.uk/lab-party/

For Immediate Release. No 304/96 Wed 18 September 1996

PENDLE MP ISSUES CHALLENGE ON PARTY FUNDING

Local MP Gordon Prentice has taunted the Conservatives to come clean about where they get their funds. He says that voters here in Pendle are entitled to know where the Tory money is coming from and he has written to Conservative Party chairman Brian Mawhinney to demand the answers.

Last week the MP was infuriated by the appearance of "Devil's eyes" posters in Pendle, dubbing them absurd and infantile.

The MP said: "Unlike the Labour Party which declares the source of every donation over £5,000 the source of Conservative Party funds is still a closely guarded secret. The Tories are spending millions of pounds on sleazy advertising campaigns but they won't tell anybody where the money is coming from."

"There is a simple reason. They are too embarrassed to tell the truth. The Tories' alien campaign techniques are being financed by secret donations from abroad. Millions from a Greek who supported the military regime who murdered and tortured. Half a million from a fraudster who jumped bail to Turkish-occupied Cyprus. Millions collected by Tory Ministers, including the Prime Minister, while on official trips to Hong Kong."

"The other big question the Tories won't answer is what do people who secretly bankroll the Tory Party get in return from the Tory Government? Until we have answers to these two questions nobody will trust them."

Note to Editors: Trade Unions and Labour. Trade union funding of the Labour Party has always been public, open and democratic. Unions have to set up a separate political fund, subject to a secret ballot, and any union member who doesn't wish to contribute can opt out. Because of the high increase in donations by other organisations and individuals the unions this year will contribute less than half of Labour Party funds. The Labour has never made any secret of where its funds

come from. Labour lists the sources of all donations over £5,000 whether from individuals or organisations. The Conservatives do not list the individuals or organisations whose donations account for nearly 90 per cent of their funds.

Conservative funds are covered in mystery. The Tory Party is ashamed to be associated with some of its funders and some of its funders are ashamed to be associated with the Tory Party. But they give funds to the Tories because they get favours in exchange. Many of the Tories' secret funders are not even British. In most countries foreign individuals and companies are not entitled to buy influence by contributing to political parties. Only the flag waving Tories think you can reconcile foreign funding with patriotism.

The Tory Party Balance Sheet: In the in party accounts to 31 March 1992 the Tories had an overdraft of £7.5 million. Their overdraft stood at £15.8 million in 1994 and £11.4 million in 1995. The accounts for the year to 31 March 1996 show that the overdraft has fallen to just £1.9 million. The Tories have not been able to say where this money has come from. If there is nothing untoward about its origin why don't the Tories come clean?

Tory Funny Money: Azil Nadir gave the Tory Party over £440,000. But it wasn't his money to give. Most of it was from the funds of his companies. The donations were not, as required by law, declared in the company accounts. The Tories have refused to return this money. Azil Nadir jumped bail and is still in Turkish-occupied Cyprus.

• Octav Botnar, the former boss of Nissan UK, gave the Tories £1 million. He is currently living in Switzerland as a tax exile. When Nissan terminated its contract with Botnar both Norman Tebbit and Cecil Parkinson offered to help him. •John Latsis, a Greek millionaire who supported the regime of the colonels who murdered and tortured Greek democrats gave the Tory Party £2 million.•Nazmu Viriani contributed to Tory Party funds. He was jailed for fraud in the BCCI collapse.

The Overseas Begging Bowl: When travelling on official business abroad Tory Ministers are in the habit of rattling the Tory begging bowl. This is most common on visits to Hong Kong. Ministers visiting there are following the example of John Major who in 1991 broke his appointment with the British Trade Commissioner to Hong Kong to meet business people to ask for money for the Tory Party - Li Ka Shing (guilty of insider dealing) and C H Tung are reported to have given £900,000 and £50,000 respectively.

The Tories have set up a Premier Club in which business people are charged £100,000 for dinner with John Major and a Team 1,000 campaign which charges £1,000 for meetings with Ministers. Premier Club members were advised to conceal their £100,000 donations from their shareholders by describing them as "entertainment" expenses. This is against the law.

For Immediate Release. No 306/96 Mon 23 September 1996

SHADOW REGENERATION MINISTER VISITS BRIERFIELD

Keith Vaz MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Planning and Regeneration was guest speaker at Saturday's (21 September) fund-raising dinner at the Brierfield Community Centre. The evening was co-hosted by local Labour councillors Azhar Ali and Roger Abbiss.

Speaking to an enthusiastic audience of over one hundred, the Leicester East MP said: "Pendle needs a Labour Government. After 17 years of Conservative misrule people afe crying out for a change. We must not let them down."

Speaking afterwards, local MP Gordon Prentice said: "Keith made a spellbinding speech. After the election, as Regeneration Minister, he could well be in a pivotal position so far as funding is concerned. He is already well aware of the needs of the area. I spoke at length in the Commons on the Housing Grants and Regeneration Bill about the particular housing problems we have in Pendle. An astonishing 57% of the housing stock was built before 1919. It is little wonder it needs a major overhaul."

"These fundraising events are very important to us in the Labour Party. Unlike the Conservatives, we cannot - and do not wish to - rely on anonymous, multi-millionaire foreigners to underwrite our election costs."

For Immediate Release. No 307/96 Mon 23 September 1996

PHOTOCALL: PARSON LEE FARM, WYCOLLER, COLNE, LANCS AT 2PM ON WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER

Local MPs Gordon Prentice and Burnley's Peter Pike will be at Mr B. Hodgson's Parson Lee Farm, Wycoller at 2pm on Wednesday 25 September to discuss the forthcoming review of the HCLA (Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance).

The MPs will be looking around the farm and taking the opportunity of discussing topical farming issues with Mr Hodgkin and representatives of the NFU.

Note to Editors: Directions to Mr Hodgson's Farm. Proceed along the M65 until the end, keep left up the dual carriageway, through the traffic lights to the next roundabout. Go straight on through two sets of traffic lights to a small roundabout. Take the second left and then immediately right to Trawden. Proceed to Trawden and then turn left at the cenotaph, take next right, signposted Wycoller. Go through Wycoller Village, across the ford and then follow track up to Parson Lee Farm.

For Immediate Release. No 308/96 Mon 22 September 1996

MP SAYS MAYOR WAS SNUBBED

Local MP Gordon Prentice has stepped into the row over the "Mayor's Snub". The air has been thick with accusation and counter accusation following the alleged snub of Pendle's Mayor, Councillor Frank Clifford, by the Liberal Democrat controlled council.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency earlier today, the MP said: "I was surprised to read the press reports of the sod cutting ceremony at the new West Craven Sports Hall as the Mayor was nowhere to be seen. This is quite unlike Frank because I know he takes his Mayoral responsibilities very seriously indeed. It seemed inconceivable to me that he would pass up the opportunity of being at the ceremony. Everyone is thrilled about the new West Craven complex and while it will principally serve the West Craven area everyone in Pendle has reason to be proud of it. We are all grateful to the local people who contributed their hard earned cash. And we thank the Council, the Lottery and West Craven High School. It was a real community effort."

"It seems there was a conscious decision to exclude the Borough's first citizen. This pettiness takes my breath away. I agree with Mr Pendle, writing in last week's Leader Times, that an investigation is needed. No-one wants to rake over the coals but there is an important issue of principle here. The fact that I, as the MP, was not invited is neither here nor there but for the Mayor to be blackballed in this way is a different kettle of fish. It should be a simple matter to check who invited the Mayor and when - and then to see when the invitation was logged in the Mayor's office."

For Immediate Release. No 309/96 Mon 23 September 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE VISITING THE HOLLIN HALL SEWING CENTRE IN TRAWDEN ON MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER AT 4pm

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting the new Hollin Hall Sewing Centre at 4pm on Monday 23 September. The Centre is to be opened by the Mayor of Pendle, Councillor Frank Clifford.

Empress Mills has been a family run business for almost 70 years. The company has moved into the former Bairdtex complex.

For Immediate Release. No 310/96 Mon 23 September 1996

MONEY DOWN THE DRAIN

"John Major has introduced 22 new taxes since the General Election to make up for the taxpayers' money he squandered on water privatisation" says local MP Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in Nelson at the weekend the MP said: "John Major has just written to voters in Tory marginal seats to try to explain away the 22 tax increases we've suffered since the General Election. He said the Government didn't have as much taxpayers' money as they wanted, so they had to put up tax.

"He should know. When he was a senior Treasury Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer he approved the privatisation deal with the water companies which cost the taxpayer billions of pounds."

"When they sold Yorkshire Water, the Government underpriced the shares by £128 million made the company a cash gift of £89m, wrote off debts of £559m which the company owed the taxpayer and gave them tax allowances on £847m invested while the industry was publicly owned. It was just the same in other parts of the country."

"With the Government squandering taxpayers' money on the scale, no wonder the Government ran out of cash and brought in 22 new make up for it. John Major shouldn't try to explain this away. He owes us all an apology for such a colossal waste of public money."

Note to Editors: On 9 September, John Major sent a letter to targetted voters in Tory marginals asking them to support the Tory Party and trying to explain away the 22 tax increases introduced by his Government since the 1992 General Election. In this letter he said "that taxpayers' money available for the Government to spend went down."

What he didn't say is one reason for that was because the Government gave away the water industry and allowed its new owners to benefit from tax concessions which have made the privatised water industry a tax-free zone.

And John Major was directly responsible for this. He was Chief Secretary to the Treasury when the deal involving the Government, the water companies and the Inland Revenue was being negotiated and Chancellor of the Exchequer when the deal finally went through. This deal cost the taxpayers a fortune.

HOW MUCH DID THE WATER PRIVATISATION COST?

The Government sold the ten water companies for £5.2 billion. By the end of the first month's trading, water industry shares were worth £6.5 billion - a loss to the taxpayer of £1.3 billion. The Government also agreed to allow the newly privatised companies to claim tax allowances on the money invested when the industry was publicly owned. As a result the companies have paid no mainstream Corporation Tax since privatisation on their water and sewerage business.

A further dubious aspect was that although for the purposes of the sale the Government valued the water companies' assets at £5.2 billion, they valued them at £7.7 billion for the purposes of the tax allowances they gave the companies. Before privatisation the water authorities had borrowed from the Government a total of £5 billion which they were supposed to pay back out of their profits. Instead of transferring this debt to the newly privatised water companies, the Government just let them off - costing the taxpayers a further £5 billion.

Not content with that, the Government gave the companies a gift of £1.5 billion, which was referred to as a "green dowry". But there was no obligation on the companies to invest it in clean-up work or even to invest it at all. So there's no wonder the Government found itself short of taxpayers' money. It had • underpriced the assets and income stream of the water companies by £1.3 billion, • **written off their £5 billion debts,** • made them a £1.5 billion gift of taxpayers' money, • given them tax allowances on £7.7 billion assets they had never invested in

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE PRIVATISATION?

Since privatisation the companies have paid no mainstream Corporation Tax on the core water and sewerage business, have made profits of £10 billion, have paid out dividends of £3 billion and

watched the value of their shares rise to £14.2 billion by November 1995. Takeovers of water companies have made more recent comparisons impossible. This process may have been good for the companies, but it has cost taxpayers a fortune and resulted in water prices rising by 78 per cent.

For Immediate Release. No 311/96 Mon 23 September 1996

LOW PAY COSTS US A FORTUNE says PENDLE MP

The cost to the public purse of subsidising low pay in the North West is a staggering £404m per year according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says this is the regional cost of in-work benefits to top up low pay. (ie Family Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Income Support for those in work.)

The Pendle MP who released the figures earlier today said: "The cost of subsidising low pay nationally is an enormous £2.9 billion. We know all about low pay here in North East Lancashire. Last year I uncovered the case of a woman "earning" slave rates of 15p an hour - but this, thank goodness, is not typical. Here in the North West 28,000 people are earning less than £1.50p an hour and 99,000 people are earning less than £2.50p an hour. These are disgracefully low rates and illustrate why we need a National Minimum Wage.

Note to Editors: Low pay is a major problem in this country. 819,000 people earn less than £2.50 an hour in Great Britain. 319,000 (39%) of these are men and 500,000 (61%) of these are women. 215,000 people earn less than £1.50 an hour in Great Britain 84,000 (39%) of these are men and 131,000 (61%) of these are women.

Low pay is a problem for everyone, not just those on low pay. To top up their income, people who are low paid have to claim * Family Credit * Income Support * Housing Benefit * Council Tax Benefit.

The taxpayer now pays £3 billion a year through social security benefits to top up the income of people in work. **That means low pay costs every single taxpayer £111 a year.** This is the true cost to the public purse of low pay in Britain. The Government is topping up what is proving to be a bottomless pit of low pay. The cost to the public purse of low pay is increasing.

For example, expenditure on Family Credit to top up the pay of those in work has more than trebled from £494 million to £1.7 billion between 1990/91 and 1995/6. The public purse cannot go on

indefinitely topping up low pay. There has to be a floor under wages - a National Minimum Wage.

Family Credit is a means-tested benefit where entitlement depends on having a sufficiently low weekly income, savings and capital. Family Credit is designed to top up low incomes for people who are in work and who have children. The amount of benefit received depends on personal circumstances, such as the number and age of children - the maximum Family Credit for a couple with two children aged O - 10, and with a net income of below £75.20 a week is £69.95.

Total cost in 1994/95: £l.4 billion
Increase since 1990/91: 192%

Income Support is a means-tested benefit where entitlement depends on having a sufficiently low weekly income, savings and capital. Income support is for people who work less than 16 hours a week or who are not working. Income Support can top up other income - including benefits such as retirement pensions and unemployment benefit - providing the total income (minus any disregards) is less than the so-called 'applicable amount' for that person. For example, the applicable amount for a single person aged 18 or over is £47.90. Income Support can also be used to meet certain housing costs such as mortgage interest payments

Total cost for those in work in 1994/95: £564m.
Increase since 1990/1: 26%

Housing Benefit: is paid to people who have a low income and pay rent. It is paid whether or not the claimant is available for, or in, work and may be paid as well as other social security benefits, or just by itself. Council tenants have their rent account credited with the benefit rent rebate. For private-ate tenants, the benefit is paid to the tenant, or in some cases, direct to the landlord. The amount of benefit depends on the number of family members, income and rent levels.

Total cost for those in work in 1994/95: £700m
Increase since 1990/91: 106%

Council Tax Benefit is an income related benefit paid by local authorities to help people pay the Council Tax. Claims can be made irrespective of whether a person is in or out of work or on other benefits. It is an income related benefit and the amount paid depends on circumstances. Those on Income Support or on incomes below income support level have their council tax paid in full through benefit.

Total cost for those in work in 1994/5: £140m
decrease since 1990/1: -18%

TOTAL COST TO TAXPAYER: £3 billion
Increase since 1990/91: 97%

For Immediate Release. No 312/96 Mon 23 September 1996

PENDLE MP BACKS TOUGH ACTION AGAINST ANTI-SOCIAL NEIGHBOURS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is calling for a crack down on anti-social neighbours. He says Labour's new policy document "Protecting Our Communities" outlines plans to take swift, firm action to deal with criminal and anti-social behaviouir.

The MP said: "Persistent anti-social behaviour is simply unacceptable. Our proposals are the result of 15 months of consultation and I believe our policies will be widely supported. We will bring in a new Community Safety Order and institute fast track procedures for eviction cases involving anti-social behaviour. There will be witness protection in civil cases involving anti-social behaviour."

"Anti-social behaviour can take many forms, from excessive noise from sound systems or dogs, to repeat burglaries, vandalism, violence and drug-related crime. Racial harassment and intimidation is also a major part of the problem.

"Noise nuisance is a major headache - and we have our share here in Pendle. Government figures show a staggering 200,000 complaints to councils in England and Wales last year."

Note to Editors: A local authority survey found that on average 11 per cent of council tenant households reported to their council incidents of anti-social behaviour of in 1995. On this basis about 400,000 council tenant households may be suffering neighbourhood nuisance. These figures ignore the many private rented tenants and owner-occupiers who are also suffering at the hands of their anti-social neighbours.

SHORTCOMINGS OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM: Labour councils such as Southwark, Manchester and Coventry have taken firm action to deal with the problem. Working with the police they have sought

injunctions to restrain or evict troublemakers. But the injunction process is, as Brighton Council said in response to Labour's consultation paper, "an unwieldy method to deal with harassment".

delays - the minimum length of time to evict a tenant for harassment is 12 to 16 weeks when the case is undefended and between 32 and 34 weeks when the case is defended. If the evidence is part of a criminal prosecution the process can often take up to a year.

witnesses - the delays mean that witnesses are often reluctant to come forward given that they must remain living nearby the perpetrators for this period.

• **limited penalties** - breaching an injunction (ie contempt of court) does not reflect the seriousness of the harassment involved. Typically breach will lead to a prison sentence of two to four weeks.

• **private tenants and owner occupiers generally not uncovered** - injunctions are normally tied to the breaking of local authority tenancy agreements.

• **under 17s** - custody is unavailable for those under 17 who break an injunction.

LABOUR'S SOLUTIONS:

1. **Community Safety Order**
• The Community Safety Order - which would apply across all housing tenure - could include curfews, exclusion from a particular area, or restrictions on approaching individuals, uttering threats, making noise of a specified kind or racist behaviour.
• The CSO would be available in the county court or, for example, at the end of criminal proceedings in a magistrates or crown court, or on an application by a senior police officer or local authority. Rules of civil evidence would apply in respect of the application for the order but the sentencing sanction of imprisonment following an arrest for breach of the order would be within the framework of the criminal law. The CSO could impose conditions on parents in respect of their minor children and where the children were over the age of criminal responsibility they could be made subject to an order where the court was convinced of the severity of the behaviour

2. **Fast-track procedure for eviction** Labour will introduce a fast-track procedure for eviction cases involving intimidation or harassment. These cases would be classified separately and would be subject to rapid pre-trial review and far tighter timetabling. Possession

orders on the grounds of serious nuisance would be possible with immediate effect - rather than the present 14-28 days.

3. **Witness protection** We shall extend witness protection orders to civil cases involving anti-social behaviour and review the potential for further revisions to court procedure to ensure that witnesses are able to give evidence without .fear of reprisal and intimidation. A number of Labour local authorities have used professional witnesses (eg council officials or private detectives) to gather evidence. We will explore the potential for them to give evidence on behalf of victims where there is a real risk of intimidation or reprisal.

4. **Housing possession orders** Labour will amend the Housing Act 1985 to ensure that in anti-social behaviour cases involving council tenants there will be a firm presumption that courts will grant possession to the local authority.

5. **Multi-agency neighbourhood nuisance teams** We will create a new statutory duty on local authorities to work with the police to prevent crime and foster safer communities. All councils should establish multi-agency nuisance and harassment working groups (including representatives of the police and council departments) to develop and monitor council-wide nuisance strategies and ensure complaints are dealt with effectively. Action on complaints could include anything from mediation through to noise abatement orders or the proposed community safety order.

For Immediate Release. No 313/96 Mon 23 September 1996

BANCROFT MILL LOTTERY CASH IS "SUPERB NEWS" says MP

News last week that Barlick's historic Bancroft Mill is to receive over £55,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund has been greeted by local MP, Gordon Prentice, as superb news. "The cash will allow this magnificent piece of engineering to remain in working order."

"This is money well spent."

Note to Editors: The granmt was announced last Wednesday 18 September. The Bancroft Mill Engine Trust was established in 1982 as a registered charity to acquire and maintain the mill engine as a working museum. Bancroft was the thirteenth and last weaving mill to be built in Barnoldswick between 1914-1920 and one of only three in the

county to survive and still run. It is the only mill engine in the North of England to be operational and steamed from an original boiler and v~rith a rope drive. The Trust demonstrate weaving on three Lancashire looms. All machinery and exhibits are provided with interpretative panels. The Heritage Lottery Fund grant will support continued use of the site as a museum by carrying out essential repairs to the mill chimney,

For Immediate Release. No 314/96 Thurs 26 September 1996

TORIES WAGING CIVIL WAR says PENDLE MP

The last 48 hours have seen a dramatic escalation of the civil war raging at the heart of the Tory party over Europe according to Pendle MP Gordon Prentice. Speaking in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: "As senior Conservatives are taking sides for and against Kenneth Clarke, John Major is sitting on the fence. He is incapable of leading even his own party, much less the country."

"Clarke commented on Sunday that the attitude of the anti-Europeans was "pathetic." On Monday, John Redwood attacked Clarke and accused him of damaging party unity. On Tuesday Michael Howard refused to support Clarke, while junior Foreign Office minister Nicholas Bonsor accused Clarke of being "out of line with the view of the vast majority of the party and...out of line with what the Government policy has been as expressed before."

"On Tuesday, John Redwood supported Bonsor, implying that the anti-Europeans represented the majority view in the party, and said it would be "dangerous to leave any options open" on monetary union. A quarter of Tory MPs voted for Redwood last summer. They don't support either Europe or Major. The statements and counter-statements show that the Tories are split from top to bottom on Europe. Now Tory grandee Douglas Hurd has accused the Party's right wing of "poisoned and prejudiced" contributions to the debate. What a state of affairs!"

"So far as Labour is concerned, no decision will be taken to join the Single Currency without the consent of the British people sought either in an election or through a referendum."

For Immediate Release. No 315/96 Mon 30 September 1996

REVOLVING DOOR JOBS

Over half of those who get jobs in the North West are likely to be unemployed again in less than a year according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP, who has been analysing this month's official unemployment figures, said: "In the North West, 52,400 people had jobs which lasted less than one year. That is 52.2% of the total number of people signing on. Latest figures show that across Great Britain, over 800,000 made an unemployment claim between January and April of this year and just over half of them (52.6%) had already made a similar claim in the previous year."

"Here in the North West, of those registered as unemployed, 23.5% have been unemployed five or more times in the last decade."

The MP added: "The revolving door economy spins on. These figures show why job insecurity has become the main growth industry in Britain and why no-one believes Ministers' false boasts about the economy. Government claims about falling unemployment conceal the truth. Skilled well-paid full-time jobs are still disappearing in every area of the country and the new jobs are mainly poorly paid, insecure and temporary."

"Labour has pledged to use a windfall tax on the privatised utilities to get 250,000 young and long-term unemployment into real work but it seems the only jobs Conservative Ministers are interested in are their own."

For Immediate Release. No 316/96 Mon 30 September 1996

MP BLASTS GOVERNMENT FOR RISING CRIME

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has condemned the Government's record on crime which he says is "deplorable". The MP was speaking in Blackpool as the Labour Party's showcase conference gets under way.

The MP said: "The rise in crime in Lancashire - as in other parts of the country - highlights the arrogant complacency of the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, who last year claimed to have turned the tide on crime. John Major and Michael Howard have been dining out on

modest falls in recorded crime, yet the British Crime Survey shows that between 1993 and 1995 when recorded crime fell, actual crime continued to rise. The Conservative party's record on crime is the worst of any British Government since the war and the worst of any comparable Western country."

"Recorded crime in Lancashire is up 122% since 1979 and up 2.7% this year. Recorded incidents of violent crime in Lancashire are up 98% since 1979 and are up a staggering 23% this year."

"According to the British Crime Survey, in the Northern regions of the country, one adult in 20 was a victim at least once in 1995 of wounding, common assault, robbery or a snatch theft. The Tory record on crime is absolutely criminal."

For Immediate Release. No 317/96 Tues 8 October 1996

MP CALLS FOR NEW CANAL AGE

Britain's canals are an underused resource according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, who is visiting the newly refurbished Rosegrove offices of British Waterways tomorrow, (Wednesday 9th) is calling for a new canal age which he says will boost tourism in the area.

The MP said: "When I'm feeling energetic, I cycle along the towpath of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal from Barnoldswick where I live to my office in Nelson and I often find myself thinking what a tremendous asset it is to the area."

"I have spoken to English Heritage about ways of making the history and the construction of the canals more accessible to people perhaps through signs and information points along the way. This is done to a limited extent at the moment but I am sure there is scope for more. Tomorrow, I want to hear from British Waterways what its plans are for the future - what the problems and opportunities are."

"The nation's canal network needs to be constantly maintained. Canals once silted up and lost become impossibly expensive to re-open. They are a living legacy of Britain's early industrial past."

ends

For Immediate Release. No 318/96 Tues 8 October 1996

PHOTOCALL: CLARE SHORT MP AND

GORDON PRENTICE MP on FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER at 7.30pm at Silverman Hall, Nelson

Labour's Overseas Development spokeswoman, Clare Short MP, will be giving the Pendle Labour Party's annual Silverman lecture this Friday (11 October). Joining her on the platform will be local MP, Gordon Prentice, and CLP chair, Dr Tony Pickles. The meeting is open to the public and press.

The lecture - one of the highlights of the Pendle Labour Party's calendar - was resurrected after the 1992 General Election which saw Gordon Prentice returned as the area's MP. Previous lectures have been given by Unison General Secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe; Alf Morris MP, the veteran campaigner on disability rights; and, last year, the Shadow Foreign secretary Robin Cook MP.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I am looking forward enormously to Friday's lecture. Clare is always good value for money."

Note to Editors: Sydney Silverman was born 101 years ago on 8 October 1895 and represented Nelson and Colne (now part of the Pendle constituency) in Parliament for 33 years. He was best known for his campaign for the abolition of the death penalty. On Silverman's death, the Editor of the Nelson Leader wrote: "It is no use pretending that Mr Sydney Silverman was the area's most loveable character. It just would not be true. He was a prickly little man. Irascible. Testy. Touchy. Quick to take offence. Slow to forgive a mistake. And, for a man so long in public life, extraordinarily sensitive to opposition or criticism.... I have joked with him amid the conviviality of the working men's club one day and wrangled with him over the telephone the next. He could chuckle impishly like Shakespeare's Robin Goodfellow. Or he could rasp out a verbal whiplash

More follows

Silverman Lecture: CLARE SHORT MP

with the venom of a serpent. You could never be sure just what mood you had him in, but either way you could not deny him these things: Sydney
Silverman had a razor's edge brain which could cut a clearly defined course through the maziest situation. He had the incisive verbal gift to

equal the brain - once, indeed, being rated in Parliament the next best debater to Churchill himself. He was an acknowledged expert on Parliamentary procedure. And however wrong he might or might not have been in the courses chosen, he was politically sincere..."

For Immediate Release. No 301/96 Wed 18 September 1996

MP SPOTS LOCAL HERO

An historic wartime document detailing the life and death of British prisoners of war in the Japanese POW Camp at Kutching in Borneo includes the name of Thomas Lawson whose father lived at 67 Bentley Street, Nelson. The MP spotted the address while dipping into the latest annual report of the National Museums of Scotland. The Museum's acquisitions for 1995 lists a "remarkable document" which it describes as a "unique and moving record of one of the most painful episodes of modern British military history".

The entry gives details of Thomas Lawson, a methodist, of Chatburn, Lancashire who was born on 21 March 1921 and died age 24 in the camp at Kushing, Borneo, on 16 July 1945. His death came just 29 days before the Japanese surrendered on 14 August bringing an end to the War in the far east. His father is listed as Mr R.N. Lawson of 67 Bentley Street, Nelson.

Today, Mr Brian Lawson the X of Thomas, lives at 67 Bentley Street. The MP has asked the National Museum of Scotland for a facsimile copy of the historic document which he intends to give to Mr X.

The MP said: "The document is a poignant reminder of the war in the far east where so many British servicemen and women had to endure a horrible captivity."

Note to Editors: The Museum report reads: "A remarkable document was donated to the Department of Armed Forces History following a request for members of the public to lend their personal collections of wartime material for display in "Momentoes of War", an exhibition to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. One of these collections related to the experience of Warrant Officer Second Class Robert Rennie of the Royal Army Service Corps who was a prisoner of the Japanese from 1942 until 1945. The collection included a hand written roll of the 196 RASC personnel held at Kuching Prisoner of War Camp in Borneo, compiled in secret by

Warrant Officer Rennie. The roll contains detailed information on the lives and deaths of the prisoners. Included are details of the various military crimes committed by the prisoners and the punishments meted out, not by the Japanese but by the British themselves. It also lists those prisoners - well over half the total - who died in the camp of disease and ill treatment. The document is a unique and moving record of one of the most painful episodes of modern British military history." (National Museums of Scotland Annual Report 1995/6. pages 24/5.)

For Immediate Release. No 319/96 Thurs 10 October 1996

FIRE CONTROVERSY RAGES ON

The future of Barlick and Colne's fire cover will be discussed today when a "three Es" (efficiency, effectiveness and economy) working party meets to consider the results of the public consultation on the Chief Fire Officer's Review of Fire Cover which ended on 31 August. The County's Fire Committee will look at the controversial issue at its next meeting on 31 October.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says the fire engines at the centre of the row - in Barlick and Colne - should be left alone. When I met the Chief Fire Officer to discuss his report I told him I did not want to see any changes to the fire cover in the two towns. People are really fed up to the back teeth with this constant speculation about the future of the fire engines."

"The Liberals have shamelessly exploited this issue by stoking up the fears of local people. The standards of fire cover are set nationally yet my local Council - which is run by the Liberals - refused to back a Labour call to press the Home Secretary to have a national review of the ancient fire standards which were set in 1958. The local Liberals have invented a preposterous story that Labour is prepared to see lives put at risk."

"I do not believe the County will cut back on Barlick and Colne's fire cover."

Note to Editors:

"The Labour County Council are suggesting that we could do without one of our fire engines... Labour and the Tories are being strangely quiet about it. Is it because it's being put forward by the Labour-controlled County Council?"

Liberal Focus Leaflet "A Decade of Action"
Published by David Whipp June 1996

FIRE COVER

“Did you know that on 23 May 1996 the Labour run Fire Service and Public Protection Committee agreed to the plan for a fire engine to be taken away from Barnoldswick to be sent out for public consultation. Taking one of our two fire engines away will make it less safe for people in Barnoldswick. It will put lives at risk. Voting Labour in the Council by election will give a green light to the Labour controlled authority that it is OK to take our fire engine away. Many Labour supporters have said they cannot vote for such a move. It is a chance they will not take. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.”
Personalised letter sent from Liberals to Barlick voters on 25 June

"I am forwarding a copy of my report (on standards of fire cover) on the recently completed review of fire risk categorisation within Lancashire. The report outlines both options for change and a number of recommendations regarding the type and scale of fire cover provided within the County and is being issued as a consultative document prior to the matter being formally considered by the Fire Authority... I would emphasise that no decisions have yet been made in respect of any items contained in the report. I have sought to indicate to the Authority the need for improvement of cover in some areas, enhancement of existing provision in some others and have outlined some areas where an option for reduction in existing cover is apparent."
Letter from the Chief Fire Officer, J.G. Russel, to Gordon Prentice MP
13 June 1996

"Do you want Barnoldswick to lose its fire engine? This is the only cut in services put forward for Barnoldswick - and it has come from the Labour run Fire Service Committee. This plan will put local lives and safety at risk. Yet only Margaret Sharples, Sharon Hurst and the local Liberal team are fighting against it. A vote for Labour this week will give a green light to the Labour Party to rob our town of one of its two fire engines. Many Labour voters have told Sharon and Margaret that this is too important a matter, and that they are voting Liberal this time as a protest against the Labour Party's crazy plan."

Liberal Focus Leaflet June 1996
published by David Whipp

For Immediate Release. No 320/96 Thurs 10 October 1996

MP RETURNS TO THE ATTACK ON TORY "DEVIL'S EYES" POSTER

Revelations that the Pendle Conservative Association pays a standing order of £60 a month to Conservative Central Office have been hailed by local Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, as a breakthrough. He says Conservative finances are shrouded in mystery, fuelling claims that the Party is bankrolled by foreign millionaires.

Yesterday's Lancashire Evening Telegraph quoted Frank Chadwick, the treasurer of the Pendle Conservative Association, saying the £60 monthly donation had been paid over for the last three or four years. He is quoted as saying "Each year we have our own budget meeting when we can work out what amount we can afford to pay to Central Office."

Gordon Prentice commented: "Devil's Eyes posters and Tory tax posters have been springing up all over the place - in Brierfield, Nelson and so on - and we were told by their Parliamentary hopeful a couple of weeks ago that "most of the funding of the Conservative Party comes from voluntary efforts such as coffee mornings, jumble sales and dinners." ((Pendle Express 24 September) That is pure moonshine."

"No-one knows who is paying for the Tory poster blitz in Pendle and that is half the problem. During the General Election campaign when Pendle gets bedecked in Tory posters I want to know who is paying for them. It is certainly not the Pendle Conservative Association."

Note to Editors: At the Labour Conference the source of all donations over £5,000 was revealed. The Party said it would refuse any donation from a foreign source not eligible to vote in a British election.

MP RETURNS TO THE ATTACK ON TORY "DEVIL'S EYES" POSTER

Labour has pledged four key reforms:

• Every political party must declare the source of all donations over £5,000.

• No company shall make a political donation without first balloting shareholders to set up a political fund.

• Any shareholder must have the right to opt out of their share of a political fund.

• No political party shall accept donations from foreign sources.

For Immediate Release. No 321/96 Tues 8 October 1996

PRENTICE BACKS BID FOR NEW SCHOOL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a bid by Governors, parents and teachers of St Thomas's CE Primary for a new school in Barrowford.

The school in Church Street - which has over 100 pupils - is vying with two others in Salford and Lancaster to get the green light. Most of the money needed for the new school would come from the Government and County with the diocese helping to bridge the funding gap.

After visiting the school yesterday, the MP said: "The children were obviously enjoying their lessons immensely and the teachers are doing a splendid job. But the surroundings in which they all have to work are very primitive. St Thomas's was built for a different age with its long narrow windows, inadequate ventilation and steep stairs."

"People have to walk through classrooms to get from one part of the building to another and this can distract the children. The head, Mr Beresford, is a keen guitarist and he has some budding Julian Breams in his charge. Unfortunately, there is nowhere to take the music lessons without everyone else hearing."

"I am in touch with Education Minister, Cheryl Gillan, to press the case for the school. A couple of hundred yards away there is land available for the replacement school. I am keeping my fingers crossed it gets the go ahead."

For Immediate Release. No 322/96 Tues 8 October 1996

DEADLINE APPROACHES AS STRESSES AND STRAINS SHOW ON THE NHS

Staff and patients at Airedale Hospital - and others who care about the NHS - have less than a week to tell the area's Health Authority what they think of the constant pressure on local hospital chiefs to make "efficiency savings". The 14 October deadline for comments on the Health Authority's Purchasing Strategy is looming says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP commented: "First of all there were the suggestions that Airedale's accident and emergency department was threatened. Then over the summer we heard reports of staff at Airedale Hospital wilting under the strain. I recall a powerful editorial in the Craven Herald claiming "efficiency savings" could only be carried through at the expense of the health of the staff and I took the matter up with the Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell."

The MP added: "It is important that people make their views known. Bradford Health Authority is already aware of my own concerns and I shall be watching events closely. Airedale lies outside my constituency but many people in West Craven use it and look upon it as their local hospital."

Note to Editors: In a letter dated 1 October 1996, the Chairman of the Bradford Health Authority, Zahida P. Manzoor, told Gordon Prentice:"The question of efficiency targets and savings has been taken up by Mr. Horam in his letter to you of 19 August. There is no doubt however that, year on year, it is becoming more difficult to generate further savings of the order of 3%. This is not surprising or uncommon throughout many acute Trusts having secured more straightforward savings in the earlier years of the annual efficiency round. Turning more specifically to Airedale, the Health Authority and its 3 Trusts have recently embarked on a major review of acute and other services. This co-ordinated exercise has already identified shared strategies and agreed priorities. Building on this work the Health

DEADLINE APPROACHES AS STRESSES AND STRAINS SHOW ON THE NHS

Authority has issued its Purchasing Strategy for the next three years together with our Contract Intentions for 1997/98. Comments on these important documents are required by 14 October. This process is the channel for Trusts to comment on our draft purchasing plans and provides scope for Airedale Trust to bring forward any matters of

concern, including those brought out in the local newspaper following comments made by the Trust Chief Executive. I hope this confirms the position of the Health Authority which as ever is open to full discussion on any issue of concern in the arena of health care provision across Bradford and Airedale.

Note 2 to Editors: The Health Minister, John Horam, in A letter dated 19 August to the Pendle MP, said: "Health authorities are set differential efficiency targets by the NHS Executive according to their past performance, capitation position and purchasing plans, in order to deliver a national efficiency target of 3 per cent. Health authorities achieve this through negotiating contracts with NHS Trusts to obtain best value for money for their local residents. These contracts may include provisions for increased efficiency so that more patients may be treated for the same amount of funds. This pressure leads to reduced leads to reduced prices and this in turn needs to be reflected in reduced costs. NHS Trusts must, therefore, regularly examine all their activities in order to remove waste and improve their operational efficient. Trusts are asked by their purchases to deliver efficiency gains for the benefit of their patients. This is a matter for local negotiation and not a national target. Efficiency savings are, however, only part of the overall contracts, which will also cover areas such as waiting list times and adherence to the Patient's Charter standards. The result of each year's local negotiations is an agreement to improve the health of the local community, which is of benefit to both parties. More money, in real terms, is being spent in the NHS than every before and this has lead to more patients being treated and shorter waiting times. Trusts are reducing the cost of treatment by increased efficiency and this allows them to use surpluses for new investment. The vast majority of Trusts are delivering further efficiency gains whilst meeting their financial targets. This must be very good news for all patients needing NHS treatment."

For Immediate Release. No 323/96 Tues 8 October 1996

LANCS AEROSPACE CHIEFS TO MEET LABOUR'S DEFENCE AND INDUSTRY TEAMS AT WESTMINSTER

Lancashire's top aerospace chiefs are to meet Labour's defence and industry spokespeople next Wednesday (16 October) at Westminster in a special meeting set up by Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice. Kelbrook based Dennis Mendoros and the deputy chairman of the Consortium of

Lancashire Aerospace, Ted Stanworth, will be joined by other directors at the London summit.

The local industrialists will be meeting Labour's Shadow Defence Secretary, David Clark, and Adam Ingram MP who deals with aerospace issues in the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) team and local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency earlier today the MP commented: "Aerospace is immensely important to North East Lancashire and I want there to be the closest possible co-operation and understanding between local industrialists and key people at the top of the Labour Party."

"I am sure the consortium will have lots of questions to fire at us and, for our part, we will want to know about their plans for the industry."

"I was at Farnborough Airshow last month and I was impressed by the Consortium's eye catching stand and displays. They are certainly putting Lancashire on the world aerospace map."

For Immediate Release. No 324/96 Tues 8 October 1996

PRENTICE BACKS BID FOR NEW SCHOOL: CORRECTION

Press Release 321 on St Thomas's Primary School in Barrowford should be embargoed until Friday 11 October.

The last paragraph contains the sentence in direct quotes "A couple of hundred yards away there is land available for the replacement school." This sentence should be deleted.

For Immediate Release. No 325/96 Mon 14 October 1996

PRENTICE BACKS EAST LANCS BID FOR CASH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a combined effort by six East Lancashire councils to get Government backing to promote and develop the area. The "East Lancashire Partnership", which includes the Chamber of Commerce and ELTEC, is bidding for cash from the Government's "Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund".

The Pendle MP was speaking after a meeting last Friday (11 October) in Accrington between council chief executives and local MPs determined to press the case for the area.

Prentice said: "The East Lancashire Partnership is an excellent initiative which deserves Government backing. It would guide and advise and co-ordinate development strategies which would benefit the whole area. I want the Government to give the Partnership its backing and support."

Note to Editors: The introduction to the bid document reads :"The people of East Lancashire share a common heritage, economy and future. They also share common and significant problems which cannot be adequately addressed by the independent action of single agencies or boroughs. The recently established East Lancashire Partnership recognises this. With SRB funds the Partnership will initiate fundamental changes which will extend well beyond the end of the SRB programme. This is a unique proposal with transferable value to other large urban areas in UK and Europe.

For a yearly average of 0.47 pence per person, SRB Challenge Funds will empower the Partnership and provide the catalyst to positively change East Lancashire.

We will drive and accelerate the change of East Lancashire from an area of small town economies to the attraction economy, and facilities consistent with the critical mass of an urban area of over half a million people - to the

bright future that can be delivered by the power and self sustaining energy of a single urban area.

Nothing less will achieve the scale of change that is needed to break the spiral of decline and deliver up opportunities for the future. Essentially this is a long term programme which will deliver dramatic outputs beyond the end of the SRB programme. However, besides building the foundations of a new future the SRB funds will deliver important outputs during its own programme period. Not least of these will be leverage of at least £4 of private sector funds for every £1 of SRB funds.

CONTEXT: East Lancashire consists of the six boroughs of Blackburn, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale, in total some 513,000 people. Some agencies already cover the whole of the area, eg Lancashire county council, the East Lancashire Training and Enterprise Council and the East Lancashire Health Authority, others are restricted to boroughs or parts of the area. This SRB proposal will bring added value to the work of the Partners, and to the various SRB, EU and other programmes which currently apply to parts of East Lancashire.

Whilst the bid is intended to be the catalyst for change, the proposals have been carefully drafted to accord with government policy directives, the development plan and other strategic guidance, and to contribute to the achievement of the wider objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy, Action for Competitiveness and the Single Programming Document for Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire.

NEED: In spite of assistance to various parts of East Lancashire the area has failed to make the move from its declining and vulnerable, labour intensive and low value added economy to a high technology, well paid, high value added economy. This single, but complicated, fact permeates across all other aspects of life in East Lancashire and contributes to unacceptable levels of poverty and poor housing.

All key indicators point to a significant spiral of decline. Investment in industry is down 25%, GDP down 20% and new business formations down 75% on national averages. Many families need some form of financial assistance; 10,554 receive Family Credit, 55,680 receive Council Tax benefits. 38,130 houses were considered to be unfit in 1991. The number of people sick and permanently off work is 60% higher, mortality rates are higher and suicides are 28% higher than the national averages.

The massive scale of the challenge for East Lancashire requires a similar response. This can only be achieved by assembling a large critical mass with the power and attraction to succeed. An empowered and extended Partnership, and a unified East Lancashire can achieve this with SRB assistance.

For Immediate Release. No 326/96 Mon 14 October 1996

SHORT CALLS FOR LEVEL PLAYING FIELD IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Shadow Overseas Development Minister, Clare Short, told a packed meeting at Nelson's Silverman Hall on Friday (11 October) that the "globalisation" of finance and production was one of the biggest challenges facing the world today.

Short, who was giving the Pendle Labour Party's Annual Silverman Lecture, said wages and conditions of employment were being driven down relentlessly in the developed world as firms sought the cheapest places to make their products and services. She said the global trading system should not allow international trade in goods and services from countries which, for example, outlaw free and independent trade unions. The very existence of trade unions guaranteed certain basic rights.

After the meeting, local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Clare's lecture was riveting. She ranged over an enormously wide canvass. She said it was difficult to get debate going on serious questions such as the single currency without the danger of being grotesquely misreported. And I have to agree with her. Any discussion of the serious issues of the day risks being reported in terms of "splits and conflict". This paralyses debate and deforms our democracy."

"Clare Short will be a major figure in a Labour Government. I was delighted she agreed to give this year's Silverman Lecture."

For Immediate Release. No 327/96 Wed 16 October 1996

PENDLE JOBLESS DOWN

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit in Pendle fell last month to 1,986 (5.6%) - down from 2,171 (6.1%) in August. 1,551 men (7.2%) and 435 women (3.1%) were unemployed and claiming

benefit. There were 170 unfilled vacancies at Colne JobCentre and 246 at Nelson.

Nationally, the seasonally adjusted jobless total fell by 35,600 last month to 2,073,100 (7.4%) - the lowest total since February 1991. Overall, the number of people out of work and claiming benefit has fallen by 190,900 over the past year.

Commenting on the latest figures, local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "We are still a long way short of the figure of 1,708 which John Major inherited from Margaret Thatcher when he became Prime Minister in November 1990."

The Pendle MP added: "No-one really believes the claimant count figures any more. Most people think they are completely bogus. The Labour Force Survey, also published today, showed a fall in the number of full time employees of 47,000 over the summer. The survey shows that 95% of those going into employment over the past year have gone into part time jobs."

The number of full time jobs for men has been shrinking alarmingly the MP said.

For Immediate Release. No 328/96 Mon 14 October 1996

PRENTICE CALLS FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO TORY FUNDING SCANDAL

New evidence about the Tories' cash for questions scandal and money paid by lobbying organisations to MPs to help fund their election campaigns justifies a wide-ranging independent judicial inquiry so that people here in Pendle can know the truth says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency earlier today before returning to Westminster for the new Parliamentary session, the MP said: "The Tories are up to their ears in new revelations about cash for questions and money paid into Tory funds by lobbying organisations."

"Labour is calling for a full public inquiry into the whole issue and I'm backing that call. Labour already publishes where we get our funding from. But John Major is refusing to allow a full public inquiry into cash for questions, just like he always refuses to say where the Tory Party gets its money. What on earth has he got to hide?

"People in Pendle are entitled to know who is bankrolling the Tories. John Major should open up the books, tell us where the Conservative Party gets its money and set up a public inquiry into the funding scandal which has engulfed Parliament. Until he does, no-one will trust him or anyone else in the Conservative Party."

Note to Editors: Following the decisions of Neil Hamilton MP and lobbyist Ian Greer to abandon their libel case against the Guardian, new revelations have emerged about cash paid to Tories.

Former Minister responsible for corporate affairs, Neil Hamilton has now admitted he did take money from the lobbyist Ian Greer in return for asking questions helpful to Greer's client Mr Al Fayed, despite telling

Michael Heseltine, the Tory Deputy Leader, when his ministerial career was on the line, that he did not have a financial relationship with Mr Greer. Ian Greer has since revealed he raised £750,000 for the Tories over the past ten years, on top of secretly paying between £500 and £5,000 into the General Election funds of 21 Conservative MPs with money supplied by Mr Al Fayed.

Improper influence: A note by Tory MP, David Willetts, when a Government Whip, recorded his discussions with the Tory chair of the Select Committee investigating the Neil Hamilton affair about how to prevent an inquiry taking place or how to use the Tory majority on the Committee limit the investigation. Ian Greer provided offices for John Major during his leadership election campaign in 1990.

Refusal to criticise Hamilton: Throughout this long saga, Government Ministers from the Prime Minister downwards have refused to criticise Neil Hamilton though he clearly did not tell the truth, when he was a Minister, about money from Al Fayed. The Secretary of State for Wales has expressed his hope that Hamilton will stand and be re-elected. Brian Mawhinney told the Today Programme on Radio 4 "as we speak he has my support".

Government blocks Inquiry: The Willetts memo is not the only example of the Government trying to prevent a full inquiry from taking place into the "cash for questions" scandal. All along the line, the Government has prevented any full inquiry taking place into the source of Tory funds and tried to prevent a proper inquiry into the "cash for questions" scandal.

Party funding: When the Nolan Committee was established, John Major set out to prevent it looking at the funding of political parties. Labour wants the Nolan Committee to look at Party funding.

Sir Gordon Downey: The PM is refusing to accept Tony Blair's request for a full public inquiry into the handling by Government and the Tory Party of "cash for questions". Instead, he has said he wants an investigation to be carried out by Sir Gordon Downey, the new Parliamentary Commissioner on Standards, to be completed in only two to three weeks. Sir Gordon Downey has said however, that he thinks it might take at least six weeks just to read all the material referring to his investigation.

The Bill of Rights 1689 prevented anything which happens in Parliament being questioned in the courts. So to help Neil Hamilton MP pursue his libel case against the Guardian, the Government changed the Bill of Rights. They whipped it through the Commons and in the Lords the change was carried by the vote of no fewer than 87 hereditary peers. The big question here is how much the Government and the Tory Party knew about the whole sleazy business when they decided to set aside a 300-year old part of the constitution.

For Immediate Release. No 329/96 Wed 16 October 1996

MP JOINS IN ONE WORLD WEEK

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be saying what "One World Week" means to him when he joins others from a variety of faiths this Sunday (20 October) at the United Reform Church at the Brierfield Community Centre. OWW is backed by churches and other organisations concerned about world development.

The MP said: "One World Week" gets people thinking about the plight of others all around the globe. That is a good reason for supporting it."

Note to Editors: Sponsors of OWW Baptist Union, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Church Missionary Society, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Justice & Peace Network, Methodist Church (International Affairs), Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Society of Friends, Traidcraft Exchange, Unitarian Church, United Reformed Church, Y Care International, YWCA. Other Members of OWW Churches Committee :Church in Wales, Presbyterian Church in Wales, Roman Catholic Church, Union of Welsh Independents, World Development Movement, Agency of CCBI.

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For Immediate Release. No 330/96 11 October 1996

GOVERNMENT PLANS BILLION POUND COUNCIL TAX HIKE

"The Government is planning to force councils to raise Council Tax and cut services, so people in Pendle will pay more and get less" says local Gordon Prentice MP.

Speaking in Colne yesterday, the MP said: "The Tories are claiming they're a tax cutting Party, but there are three things they don't want the public to remember. First - at the last General Election they promised not to put up taxes. Second - since then they've put up central Government taxes 22 times. Third - their Budget next month is likely to force councils to push up Council Tax and cut services yet again. So people in Pendle will have to pay more and get less."

The MP added: "Ever since they were forced to replace the Poll Tax with the Council Tax, the Government has forced local councils to put up the Council Tax. Figures published with last year's Budget show that the Government plans to force Council Tax payers to cough up an extra £3.5 billion over the next three years - that's equal to putting around 2p on the standard rate of Income Tax. They're likely to try to pull the same fast one again in this year's Budget."

"And of course, the way the money is shared out is a Tory racket to bail out their friends in Westminster. If Pendle Council had got as much Government grant per head this year as Westminster Council, they wouldn't have needed to collect Council Tax at all. Pendle Council would have been able to pay out a rebate of £600."

Note to Editors: The Government is planning to force Council Tax increases well above the rate of inflation for the third successive year.

COUNCIL TAX HIKE

Cabinet Ministers are all trying to peddle the lie that they are the tax cutting party and talking up the prospects for tax cuts before the General Election. But if there are any tax cuts they will be matched by tax increases elsewhere. In particular, the Government's Budget strategy is likely to try to force local councils to put up the Council Tax. This is part of a deliberate strategy to blame Labour (and Liberal Democrat) councils for tax rises.

Ever since they introduced the Council Tax to replace the Poll Tax, the Tories have planned for it to rise by more than the rate of inflation. In his Budget last year, Kenneth Clarke planned for an average Council Tax increase of 8 per cent, but councils managed to keep it down to 6 per cent. The year before councils managed to keep the increase down to just over 5 per cent. The year before that they managed to keep it down to just over 3 per cent.

Figures published by the Department of the Environment at the time of last year's Budget show that the Government's Budget strategy includes plans to force Council Tax payers to cough up an extra £3.5 billion in Council Tax over the next three years - that's equal to putting around 2p on the standard rate of income tax.

The Westminster (Council) funding racket is set to continue. If every council this year had got the same Government help per head of population as Westminster, 94 per cent of Council Tax payers wouldn't have had to pay up at all. They'd have got rebates instead.

For Immediate Release. No 331/96 Wed 16 October 1996

DEFENCE SECRETARY ADMITS CRASHED TORNADO WAS BADLY SERVICED

The F3 Tornado which crashed yards away from Blackpool pier on the first day of the Labour Party Conference had been serviced badly by a contractor according to Defence Secretary, Michael Portillo, who was speaking in the debate on the Defence Estimates.

The Defence Secretary made his surprise admission after Labour MP, Rhodri Morgan, alleged that the doomed Tornado had been damaged by defective contractor work carried out by Airwork Ltd and was the first of 14 aircraft to go on a pre-certification trial flight. He said three aircraft (costing £25m apiece) had already been written off. Responding, Mr Portillo said: "The aircraft was one that had been badly serviced by another contractor but British Aerospace would not have taken up into the air any aircraft unless it was satisfied that it was air worthy".

Speaking at Westminster today, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I have always had very serious doubts about the wisdom of privatising the maintenance of RAF fast jets. I have constituents who are ex RAF tell me they fear cutting corners will lead to a major disaster. What happened in Blackpool - which so easily could have ended in tragedy - makes the point for me."

Five months ago, after a spate of low flying over his Pendle constituency, the MP raised questions about the amount of RAF maintenance work that had been privatised. At the time he said that cost seemed to be the only factor taken into account.

For Immediate Release. No 332/96 Thurs 24 October 1996

MP ON THE LOOK OUT FOR BRIGHT IDEAS TO CELEBRATE 2000

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is trawling for good ideas on how the North West can celebrate the millennium. The MP has been pressing the Government to look beyond the Exhibition at Greenwich in London which is to be the focus of the national celebrations in the year 2000.

Earlier this month the Prentice quizzed the National Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, about progress on the preparations for the Millennium Festival in Greenwich. The Minister told the Pendle MP a related national programme of events is planned for 1998 and 1999. She added: "The Millennium Commission has yet to consider the nature of any support it may offer to a wider programme of Festival events in the year 2000. Should you have any suitable ideas for festival events I would be happy to hear from you."

The Pendle backbencher is not letting the grass grow under his feet. "The year 2000 is just around the corner. I want to see Festival events in the Pendle area. I just need some good ideas!"

For Immediate Release. No 333/96 Mon 21 October 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE EARBY TRAINING CENTRE at 11.30am today, Monday 21st

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining the Mayor of Pendle, Councillor Frank Clifford, at the formal opening at 11.30am today of the Earby Training Centre, Victoria Road.

For Immediate Release. No 334/96 Mon 21 October 1996

MP SAYS "ECOLOGICAL TIME BOMB" IS TICKING

An "ecological time bomb" is waiting to blow up in our faces says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP, who was celebrating "One World Week" at the United Reformed Church at Brierfield yesterday, told the congregation that animal and plant species were disappearing off the face of the planet at an alarming rate. We all have to wake up to what is happening said the MP.

"In Britain in 1992 we said good-bye to the mouse eared bat. It was declared extinct in the UK. Half of the animal species in Europe which were in existence at the turn of the century are now gone. A third of the remaining 770 face extinction within the next twenty years. World-wide, half of all existing species will become extinct in the next 50 to 100 years if current rates of tropical deforestation continue. The rain forests cover only 7% of the earth's surface but they contain 90% of all living plant and animal species. Throughout the 1980s an area of tropical forest 7.5 times the size of Wales was lost every year."

The MP said called for fairness in our trading relationships with the developing world - including the payment of "genetic prospecting rights" where valuable compounds are derived from plants and animals found in the tropical rain forests. The MP added: "We should stop the importation of tropical hardwoods. Timber should only come from sustainable sources. And we need to lift the terrible burden of debt shouldered by some of the poorest countries on earth."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee. There are just 12 "hot spot" countries that are home to 70% of the world's biodiversity. These include Brazil,

Columbia, China, Mexico, Indonesia, Equador, India, Zaire and Madagascar.

More follows

"ECOLOGICAL TIME BOMB"

95% of Mangroves in the largest province in Indonesia have been cleared. Forests have virtually disappeared in places such as Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia.

Nearly half the 300 strong global population of mountain gorillas live in one park in Rwanda. Only 2,300 Black Rhinos are left. And 80 Java Rhinos.

Plants used in agriculture whose genetic diversity has been encouraged by farmers for thousands of years are in danger of being replaced by a few varieties of high yielding, genetically bland crops. In India, 30,000 different strains of rice have been planted over the past 50 years. Three quarters of India's rice fields may be planted with only ten varieties by the year 2,005. In Indonesia, three quarters of the rice grown derives from a single maternal plant.

Half the world's pharmaceutical compounds are derived from plants. Taxol, an anti cancer drug which has only just been discovered, is extracted from the bark of Pacific Yew Trees - until recently nobody thought the Pacific Yew was anything special.

The Madagascan golden baboon can detoxify cyanide which is found in large amounts in the bamboo it eats. Anticoagulants are found in snakes and vampire bats. Australian Corals exposed in shallow seas to the sun produce protective materials which are being extracted and synthesised for sun tan lotions.

For Immediate Release. No 335/96 Thurs 24 October 1996

MP WANTS CRACKDOWN ON SMUGGLERS

Pendle's publicans and corner shops are losing a small fortune as customers are turning to bootlegged booze and smuggled cigs says local MP Gordon Prentice. He claims takings have plummeted over the past year as smugglers have started operating "on an industrial scale".

The MP commented: "One trader told me his takings from handrolling tobacco have dropped by 23.5% over the past year but his sales of cigarette papers have shot up by 17% over the same period. His cigarette sales are down 13% - and this simply cannot be the result of people giving up."

"Earlier this month I met a gathering of Pendle publicans and they told the same story. The North West is awash with cheap booze brought over from France."

"In the short term the punters are happy but what happens when the pubs start closing? We have already lost five in Pendle in the past year."

"I am in touch with the Chancellor of the Exchequer but he is part of the problem. He has been complaining about lost tax revenues yet he is the man responsible for making deep cuts in the Customs and Excise. The Coast guard is a shadow of its former self. It is no wonder people can smuggle vast quantities of drink and tobacco into the country."

For Immediate Release. No 336/96 Thurs 24 October 1996

MP SAYS RAIL CUTS ARE ON THE CARDS

Cuts in rail services to Pendle and Burnley are on the cards says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has published a consultation paper on the standard of rail services it will insist upon when private operators bid for the franchise to run the region's railway (The draft Passenger Service Requirement).

The MP commented: "I have buried myself in the small print of this document and with some expert help from STELLA (Support the East Lancashire Line Association) it is as clear as daylight that cuts in services are planned."

"If this is allowed to happen the railways will die the death of a thousand cuts. If connections are lost, people who have access to alternative transport will simply stop using the train. We should stick to the present timetable as a bare minimum - and improve on it wherever possible. When the railways were privatised we were all promised improved services. Not this."

Note to Editors: STELLA adds: • The Colne-Preston route D1 and Preston-Blackpool South D2 are at present combined. The draft Passenger Service Requirement document does not require the

franchisee to maintain this useful and convenient combination. The present Colne-Blackpool South service is a must. • The first services Preston-Colne Monday to Saturday at 04.46 and 05.30 and the first service from Colne to Preston at 05.46 are not specified in the PSR. This latter service which arrives Preston 06.50 connects with the 07.00 Lancashire Pullman service to London Euston. This is an important connection. • On Sundays the 08.01 Preston to Colne and the 20.58 Preston to Burnley Central are also not specified.

For Immediate Release. No 337/96 Wed 23 October 1996

CASTLE CEMENT

The surprise withdrawal of Castle Cement's appeal against conditions imposed by the Environment Agency on the burning of the controversial waste derived fuel Cemfuel has not robbed people of the opportunity to makes their views known says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The Commons Environment Select Committee is returning to the issue for the second time and will be in Clitheroe to take evidence on 6 November.

The Pendle MP says last week's turn around by Castle Cement comes after months in which the company maintained it was impossible to comply with the conditions laid down by the Environment watchdog. The Public Inquiry scheduled for 12 November would have given people the opportunity to ventilate their concerns. They will still be able to do so when the Environment Committee visits the town next month."

The MP added: "We need complete openness and transparency. Nothing else will do."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP's Commons debate on 20 March 1996 sparked renewed interest in the long running saga. It was covered in John Waite's BBC's award winning "Face the Facts" programme on 29th May this year. On 9 May, the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, agreed that the appeal by Castle Cement against conditions imposed by the Environment Agency on the operation of the plant at Clitheroe would be held in public.
Castle Cement appealed on the grounds that it could not meet the deadline to stop plume-grounding. The company also wanted to relax the limit on sulphur emissions and the condition that the electrostatic precipitators should be operational all the time. The company also wanted more flexibility in the composition of cemfuel.

For Immediate Release. No 338/96 Wed 23 October 1996

MP CALLS ON PENDLE LIBERALS TO PRESS FOR REVIEW OF NATIONAL FIRE COVER STANDARDS

Local MP Gordon Prentice has again called on Pendle's Liberal Democrats to join forces with Labour in pressing for a review of the Home Office national minimum standards of fire cover. Last month, the Liberal controlled Pendle council voted down a motion put by Labour Group Leader Carol Hopkins calling for an early review of the standards which were set in 1958. The Liberal Democrats claimed the Labour move would detract from the united response to the County Council which meets next week to discuss fire cover across Lancashire.

The MP said: "I will eat my hat if the County Council gets rid of the fire engines in Colne and Barlick. It is simply not going to happen. The County is not going to axe two fire engines to make a candle end saving of around £30,000 in a service that costs £36m to run. Every year the Liberals fan the flames of speculation, saying the towns will lose half their fire cover. It never happens. It only makes people feel anxious."

"Next Thursday (31 October) when the County's Fire Committee votes for the status quo in Colne and Barlick - as I confidently predict it will - we shall see a blizzard of Liberal Focus leaflets claiming they forced the County into a re-think."

"Once the local Liberals have printed and delivered their bogus Focus leaflets next week I want Pendle Council to urge the Home Secretary to review of the national fire cover standards. The Government must ensure the fire service is adequately funded."

For Immediate Release. No 339/96 Wed 23 October 1996

PRENTICE SLATES QUEEN'S SPEECH

The government's plans for the 1996/97 parliamentary session illustrate the bankruptcy of Tory leadership says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster earlier today the MP said: "The legislation is either threadbare, stolen from Labour, or extreme. And it fails utterly to meet the challenges facing Britain to repair our fractured society and equip our economy for the future."

"The Prime Minister told us today we are now going to get Government Bills on stalking and on the paedophiles register. This is excellent news but what an astonishing U turn! He changed his mind in the middle of the debate itself."

Note to Editors: Education for the few not the many: measures to establish new grammar schools and extend selection, and expansion of the Assisted Places Scheme will drive a further wedge into Britain's *"fractured society"* which the Tories have created. NHS privatisation and bureaucracy: measures likely to allow commercialisation of primary care GP services, and nothing to remedy the two-tier NHS now emerging.
Crime. The Tories have failed to include critical measures on juvenile sentencing or knives. Other measures expected in the Queen's Speech have been dropped: Adoption: Updating of the law and new measures to safeguard children's welfare in draft bill in March - now dropped. Competition law: seven years after a white paper, and a draft Bill in August 1996 to tackle the problem of anti-competitive behaviour - now dropped. Employer access to criminal records: appeared in June white paper on giving employers easier access to job applicants' criminal records - now shelved. ID cards: promised for years and officially announced in the form of photo card driving licenses on 22 August of this year - now shelved.

For Immediate Release. No 340/96 Thurs 24 October 1996

PRENTICE RIDICULES MAJOR U TURN

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has ridiculed the Prime Minister's attempt today to disguise yesterday's U turn on stalking and paedophiles. The PM claimed Tony Blair's offer of co-operation on Bills was "a tactical ploy".

The MP said: "John Major is floundering. It was Labour's Janet Anderson who tried to bring in a Stalking Bill earlier this year but she was stymied by the Government. And on Monday, Jack Straw wrote to Michael Howard saying *"you have every reason to know that we are always ready to facilitate the passage through Parliament of agreed measures .... We stand ready to help again, and I would urge that you include these measures in your legislative programme."*

The MP continued: "Yesterday in his response to the Queen's Speech, Tony Blair was echoing the offer made two days earlier by Jack Straw. The truth is that on crime the Tories talk tough but act weak. On crime, we led the way on stalking and action against paedophilia. On tax , we

stopped the Government raising VAT on fuel to 15%. On sleaze, we forced the Tories to accept the Nolan recommendations on the disclosure of MPs' outside earnings."

"Having forced the Tories to take action on stalking and paedophilia we will now be stepping up our call for action against the sale of combat knives, and demanding a ban on handguns."

For Immediate Release. No 341/96 Tues 29 October 1996

PRENTICE CONDEMNS "CHAOS AND DRIFT" IN GOVERNMENT

Less than a week since the Queen's Speech and the Government has drifted into chaos and U-turns says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster today as the Commons debates education in the Queen's Speech, the MP said: "The problem of school discipline is hitting the headlines with the closure of Manton junior school in Nottinghamshire. But the government is reduced to feeble criticism of Labour's plan for compulsory home/school contracts with parents on their children's behaviour. And today, again making policy on the hoof, Gillian Shepherd implied cabinet support for caning. Michael Howard meanwhile today made public his support for beatings."

The Pendle MP said: "Under a Labour Government all schools will be required to draw up home/school contracts setting out the mutual rights and responsibilities of pupils, parents and teachers. These will cover expectations of behaviour, homework, and communication with parents about their child's progress."

For Immediate Release. No 342/96 Tues 29 October 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT BARNOLDSWICK TOWN SQUARE at 10am on SATURDAY 2 NOVEMBER. (11am at Colne Market)

LABOUR POURS COLD WATER ON LIB DEM FIRE SCARE

Local MP Gordon Prentice will be joining Labour Party members in the Town Square in Barnoldswick this Saturday. They will be distributing leaflets about the alleged threat to the fire cover in Barnoldswick and Colne.

The MP will be available to answer any questions about fire cover in the area.

On Tuesday the MP said: "I have already said I do not believe for one moment the County will cut the fire cover in Barnoldswick and Colne (the Fire Committee meets on Thursday 31 October). It is time our local Liberal Democrats stopped frightening people with talk of cuts in fire cover. They should join Labour councillors in Pendle and call on the Home Secretary to review the standards of fire cover which are almost 40 years old."

"Our local Liberal Democrat councillors are the worst kind of headline grabbing populists. They know Lancashire this year is already spending on the fire service 10% more than the Government believes it should. Hell will freeze over before the County cuts our local fire engines."

For Immediate Release. No 343/96 Wed 30 October 1996

IT'S MOTORWAY MADNESS SAYS PENDLE MP

The M65-M6 link is due to be completed in almost exactly 12 months time according to Roads Minister, John Watts. And traffic on the M65 is likely to rise by just over 10%.

The Minister was replying to local MP, Gordon Prentice, who had raised yet again the question of likely traffic flows at Colne - where the motorway comes to an abrupt halt at the Vivary Bridge roundabout.

The Minister told the MP: "It is anticipated that traffic on the M65 will rise by just over 10% when the road is complete. It is possible that this increase will extend to the east of Blackburn but no specific estimates for traffic flows at Colne have been made."

The MP countered: "It is staggering that the Government has not done any modelling on likely traffic flows at Colne which is where the snarl ups will be. You don't need to be a clairvoyant. The Minister knows the problems. He came to Pendle on my invitation in August last year."

Once the link is built, a10% rise in traffic will mean an extra 4,500 vehicles per day.

For Immediate Release. No 344/96 Wed 30 October 1996

NORTH WEST WATER BRINGS UP THE REAR

North West Water has the worst record of any water company in England when it comes to replacing and repairing sewers according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was speaking at Westminster last night after a meeting of the all Party Parliamentary Water Group. The MP said: "I was shocked to see figures from the water watchdog OFWAT which showed that in 1994/5 North West Water capital spending on sewerage totalled £938m - £312m short of the total expected (£1,248m). There are 30,000 kilometres of sewers in the region and a third of them (10,000 kilometres) are critical - ones that are very important to the network. Between 1990/91 and 1994/5, the company renovated 82 kilometres of critical sewers and replaced 85 kilometres. NWW should be spending all the cash it can afford in replacing these antiquated Victorian sewers."

In England, 10% of 295,000 km of sewers are unsatisfactory.

Capital spending 1994/5 on sewerage services (source OFWAT)

	Total spent £m	Total expected £m	Difference £m
Anglican	952	748	206
Northumbrian	279	383	-105
North West	938	1,248	-312
Severn Trent	1,220	1,171	49
Southern	549	677	-128
South West	548	652	-104
Thames	973	906	67
Welsh	388	411	-23
Wessex	369	443	-74
Yorkshire	572	664	-93
Total	6,787	7,301	-514

For Immediate Release. No 345/96 Wed 6 November 1996

not used

For Immediate Release. No 346/96 30 October 1996

SHEPHERD GIVEN A CANING

The government's education policy is in chaos following John Major's extraordinary slap-down of Gillian Shephard over caning yesterday says local MP Gordon Prentice. The Pendle MP says beating children is no answer to discipline problems in schools.

The MP said: "When I was at school I was always in the deputy head's office, arms outstretched and fingers trembling, on the receiving end of a fearsome looking thick leather "strap". I can no longer remember the nature of my various misdemeanours but I am convinced alternative sanctions such as detention would have made more impression."

The MP added: "Yesterday there was confusion at the heart of Government. The Prime Minister telephoned the Education Secretary within hours of her remarks on the Today programme, where she had hinted that caning might become part of the government's education Bill, to correct her on the official line. Before they realised what was happening Tory backbenchers were waxing lyrical about the virtues of a sound thrashing, in the absence of any other ideas for raising school performance and standards."

"I want to see the introduction of home/school contracts. These will reduce the chances of some youngsters getting a second-rate education. The government's policies have become a joke."

For Immediate Release. No 347/96 Wed 30 Oct 1996

CUT VAT ON FUEL SAYS PRENTICE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today called on the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, to cut VAT on fuel to 5 per cent in the forthcoming budget. The Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown says this pledge will be included in Labour's election manifesto.

Prentice said: "Putting VAT on fuel was the unkindest cut of all. Pendle in winter isn't the Mediterranean and lots of folk spend an absolute fortune just to keep warm. If there is room for tax cuts, the priority must be reducing VAT on domestic fuel from 8% to the 5% permitted under EU law. This is the fairest tax cut."

Note to Editors: New analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies backs Labour's position. It shows that those aged over 65 would gain the most from a VAT fuel tax cut, and that the poorest ten per cent

would gain almost three and a half times as much (as a proportion of their expenditure) as the richest ten per cent.

The Government would like to raise VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent - as it tried to do in 1994, but were defeated by the Opposition. The Government also wants to put VAT on more goods and services. On 16 July 1993 Kenneth Clarke said: "I have always thought it anomalous to have such a narrow VAT base in this country".

There has been 22 tax rises since 1992, including VAT on fuel. This means the typical family will have paid an extra £2,000 in tax between 1992 and the next general election. Labour has always made clear that tax proposals and spending plans would be taken in the light of the economic circumstances at the time of the election. Our principles on tax are that taxes should encourage work, opportunity and reward effort, be fair and based on the ability to pay promote long-term investment which produces growth in the economy.

For Immediate Release. No 348/96 30 October 1996

THE LINE

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice will be reviewing newspaper coverage of this week's political events on Granada Television's regional political programme "The Line".

"The Line" goes out tomorrow evening (Thursday) at 11.10pm.

For Immediate Release. No 349/96 Thurs 31 October 1996

PRENTICE WINS COMMONS DEBATE ON LANCASHIRE FIRE SERVICE

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice will be taking the controversy over the funding of the Lancashire Fire Service to the floor of the House of Commons next Wednesday (6 November). The MP secured an adjournment debate after pressing the Speaker for an early opportunity to highlight the difficulties facing the service.

Speaking at Westminster yesterday, the MP said: "Like many people in Pendle I have been thoroughly sickened by the way in which the fire service has been used as a political football by the local Liberal

Democrats who never miss a chance to alarm people with talk of threats to the fire engines in Colne and Barnoldswick."

"The debate will give me the chance to press Home Office Ministers to review the ancient fire cover standards which date from 1958."

"I also hope my local Liberal Democrat controlled council will press the Home Secretary for a review of the fire cover standards given the song and dance they make about the issue. I doubt they will. They seem much more at home manufacturing scare stories in Pendle and taking pot shots at the Lancashire Fire Service than in joining argument with the Government."

Note to Editors: Lancashire Fire Committee meets today to consider the Chief Fire Officer's Review of Fire Cover in the County.

For Immediate Release. No 350/96 Thurs 7 November 1996

LABOUR AND THE CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY

Speaking at Westminster yesterday, local MP Gordon Prentice, said: "I am naturally very saddened to hear that Labour's policy on the CSA may cause one or two Party members to consider voting Liberal Democrat in the forthcoming General Election. Labour's policy on the CSA is settled and it deserves support. Ever since I was elected as the MP for Pendle I have had to deal with the casualties of the CSA and its incompetent handling of cases. It richly deserved the criticism it got. That is why we will be fundamentally reforming it and relaunching it as the Child Maintenance Service."

"Even though the Government claims to be the party of the family, the effect of their policies has been to undermine families and children. In particular, the botched introduction of the Child Support Agency has entangled hundreds of thousands of families in a bureaucratic nightmare, with little or no benefit to children."

"One child in three now lives in poverty - more than three times as many as when the Conservatives came to power. The record of the CSA has been appalling. The Social Security Select Committee reported that: "the agency's performance in the first year to 18 months was dire". Despite the introduction of the CSA only a quarter of lone parents is receiving the maintenance they are owed, leaving taxpayers to foot the bill in benefits."

"Labour believes the interest of children should be at the heart of Government policy. Our proposals will enhance the well-being of children, make the CSA more efficient and create a system which is fair to everyone and commands public support."

More follows:

LABOUR AND THE CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY

"We will give unemployed lone parents new pathways into work through our national child-care strategy, better training, more on-line information on jobs and benefits, and by making the facilities of the Employment Service available to them."

"We will not tolerate absent parents avoiding their responsibilities and getting away with not paying the maintenance they owe. Our initial target will be to ensure that an additional 100,000 parents pay maintenance."

"We want to use the money released by ensuring that parents pay the maintenance they owe, to introduce a "maintenance disregard" into the Income Support system, so that the parent with care can keep a proportion of the maintenance collected. A disregard will encourage all parents with care to claim the maintenance they are owed and, because maintenance payments continue when the parent with care moves into employment, a disregard will help ensure that everyone is better off in work than out."

"We will also improve the CSA's independent appeals machinery, for instance by extending the grounds for appeal to include complaints about the administrative process."

For Immediate Release. No 351/96 Wed 6 November 1996

MP SAYS DORRELL's PRESCRIPTION FOR THE NHS IS NOT WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

The battle by Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell to secure more cash for the NHS will not avert a crisis this winter according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP said: "The stresses and strains on staff at Airedale - highlighted by the Craven Herald newspaper - are symptomatic of the problems facing other NHS hospitals"

The MP continued: "A large proportion of Stephen Dorrell's extra cash will go into bureaucracy. Until the Tories brought in the internal market, NHS administrative overheads were among the lowest in the world. Now time and money is wasted on marketing and contracting which could be spent on patient care."

- "The cost of bureaucracy has doubled as a direct result of the internal market and annual contracts. A recent BMA paper estimated the additional financial burden of at £1.7 billion a year. More than £4 million extra is spent *every day* on red tape - enough for 4,000 operations."

* "Since 1989/90 annual spending on managerial and administrative staff has almost doubled from £1.2 billion to £2.3 billion. In 1995 spending on managers alone soared by £112 million, an inflation-busting rise of 18.3 per cent."

* The MP added: "There are 20,000 more senior managers and 50,000 fewer nurses in the NHS than before the Tory reforms."

For Immediate Release. No 352/96 Wed 6 November 1996

MP ROASTS MINISTER OVER FIRE POLICY

Pendle MP gave Home Office Minister Tom Sackville a roasting in the Commons today over the Government's alleged neglect of the fire service. The MP said the Government's cash support fell far short of what was needed to provide the standard of service people had the right to expect.

The MP called for a review of the Home Office Minimum Standards of Fire Cover which he claimed were out of date and inadequate. The MP told the Commons: "Lancashire is by far and away the busiest of the shire county fire authorities. The total number of incidents dealt with last year went up 16% to 34,814.

He added: "Like many fire authorities around the country, Lancashire is spending above the level the Government thinks it should. In our case 10% above. This year the county will be spending £37.9m on the fire service while the Government says it should be pegged at £34.4m." The MP explained this was in part because Lancashire provides a service way above the National Minimum Standards. "We send two pumps to every emergency call involving a building fire - irrespective of the risk classification. A house going up in smoke in Barlick (C risk category) is

as much a disaster for the person living there as one burning down in Colne (B risk)."

The MP savaged the local Liberal Democrats for taking every opportunity to vilify the County. He said there would be no cuts to the fire cover in Barnoldswick and Colne and pressed the Minister to have an early meeting with the fire authority.

For Immediate Release. No 353/96 Wed 6 November 1996

MP BACKS NEW POLICIES ON CHILDREN

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, welcomed the publication earlier today of important new policies designed to help children in the early years.

Labour's new document *Early Excellence, A Head Start for Every Child* sets out measures including new Early Excellence centres to bring together nursery education and child care, stimulating and supporting the development of new facilities.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP commented: "This is just what we need here in Pendle. Nursery education is a top priority for an incoming Labour Government. I want to see a new partnership between our local education authority and voluntary and private sector providers to plan the expansion of early years services which will replace the bureaucratic voucher scheme."

"There will be a new role for health visitors, supporting the educational development of children from day one, in partnership with parents, to ensure that all new parents, especially those without experience or guidance, are equipped with the skills they need. We want to see action to raise standards, including uniform standards for registration and inspection, minimum space requirements in all nursery settings and improved training opportunities for early years workers."

The MP said: "Labour's plans for the vital Early Years are practical and make common-sense."

For Immediate Release. No 354/96 Wed 13 November 1996

MP VOTES FOR GUN CONTROL

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, last night backed the Government's Firearms (Amendment) Bill which will ban high calibre hand guns completely and make it unlawful for small calibre .22 pistols to be held

outside a licensed pistol club. The MP, who wants to see a complete ban on hand guns, said he backed the Bill as the minimum necessary to protect the public.

Speaking at Westminster after the vote the MP said: “Last March, after the terrible tragedy at Dunblane, I said there could be no conceivable reason why hand guns should be kept at someone’s home. Of course, nothing can stop a maniac who is intent on harming other people but a ban on the private possession of hand guns would reduce the risk of multiple murders and carnage."

The MP added: "We should also licence the possession of air guns. There is no earthly reason why anyone under the age of 18 should have such a weapon."

Last March, in the wake of the Dunblane massacre the MP said he wanted to see the House of Commons gun club closed down and the space given over to a crèche. He said it was astonishing that Parliament could find space for a gun club but not for a crèche.

Note to Editors: There will be further votes on the Bill next Monday.

For Immediate Release. No 355/96 Wed 13 November 1996

PENDLE JOBLESS - BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED FROM (ALMOST)

After six years in Downing Street, unemployment in Pendle is almost back to the level John Major inherited from his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, in November 1990.

The jobless figures released today show that 1,770 (5%) people were out of work and claiming benefit last month - compared with 1,708 six years ago. October's figures reveal that 1,402 men were jobless (6.5%) and 368 women (2.6%). There were 295 unfilled vacancies at Nelson JobCentre and 200 at Colne. In the North West region, there were 225,000 unemployed people (7.9%) - 3,500 down on the September figure.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The Prime Minister will regard these latest figures as a great triumph yet they only take us back to where we started from six long years ago. The way in which the figures are compiled has been changed so often people have lost count. The integrity of the statistics has been called into question and it is

certainly the case that we are no longer comparing like with like. Curiously, every change has taken the figures downwards. The new jobs are also very different from the old - they are often insecure and low paid."

"When and if Pendle's jobless figures drop to the level the PM inherited I intend to write to him asking why it took so long."

For Immediate Release. No 356/96 Tues 12 November 1996

MAJOR WANTS UK "TO WORK LONGER FOR LESS" SAYS PENDLE MP

People in Britain are working longer hours - and often for less money - than their counterparts in Europe says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP claims people here work over three hours a week longer than the average of the 15 European Union countries.

Prentice said: "We should welcome the Working Time Directive which will protect people from being forced, against their will, to work over 48 hours a week. If people are happy working longer they can. It is entirely voluntary. Instead of attacking the Working Time Directive he should be explaining why we in Britain work longer hours than our neighbours on the continent with less job security and with no minimum wage protection."

The MP added: "We now have the Jobseekers Act on the statute book which stops benefit after six months of unemployment. It is all part of the strategy of turning Britain into a low wage, sweat shop, off-shore island where terms and conditions that would be unacceptable in mainland Europe are tolerated here."

Note to Editors: Employees Working Full Time - hours per week

UK 43.9	Portugal 41.2
Spain 40.7	Greece 40.3
Ireland 40.2	Sweden 40
France 39.9	Luxembourg 39.8
Germany 39.7	Austria 39.6

Netherlands 39.5	Denmark 38.9
Finland 38.6	Belgium 38.4
Italy 38.4	EU average 40.3

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey 1995

For Immediate Release. No 357/96 Wed 13 November 1996

MP BLASTS FORMER TRANSPORT MINISTER WHO GETS A JOB "ON THE BUSES"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hit out at Tory MPs joining the private sector companies they had a hand in privatising. The MP's fury was provoked by news last week that former transport minister, Stephen Norris, is to get a £100,000 a year job on the board of a bus company in London that he helped privatise.

Speaking at Westminster the MP said: "Conservative Ministers have no shame. The privatisation of London's buses was Steve Norris' direct responsibility. Common decency suggests he should not walk out of Government and start taking money from one of the beneficiaries of his policies."

"The shamelessness of this move - coming on top of Tim Eggar's move sideways from Energy Minister to an oil company boardroom - will heighten public cynicism about Ministers who legislate for their own futures rather than the national interest."

The MP added: "The Government has created a very uneven playing field in the bus industry. Burnley Council valiantly tried to make a go of a working partnership with Stagecoach but the company had too much muscle and could dictate terms. It is fast becoming a regional monopoly in the North West."

Note to Editors: Stephen Norris is one of a stream of senior Conservatives who have moved from government to boardroom. Besides Tim Eggar, Lord Young was appointed Chairman of Cable and Wireless, Nigel Lawson is now Deputy Chairman of Hill Samuel, John MacGregor is a director of Nat West. Lord Wakeham has accepted a directorship at Rothschilds and Douglas Hurd has accepted a directorship at Nat West.

For Immediate Release. No 358/96 Wed 13 November 1996

HOWARD MUST SAY WHY HE IS REFUSING UK CITIZENSHIP TO AL FAYED BROTHERS

The Appeal Court today ruled that Michael Howard should explain why he has refused British citizenship to the Fayed Brothers - the Egyptian born owners of Harrods. The Home Secretary is to appeal against the decision in the House of Lords.

In April this year, Home Office Minister Timothy Kirkhope told Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, he was unwilling to disclose the reasons for blackballing the Al Fayed brothers who have spent over thirty years in this country. The Pendle MP told the Commons the Minister's decision was "an act of political spite".

Eighteen months ago, the regulars at the Alma Inn, Laneshawbridge in the MP's Pendle constituency, were toasting the news that Mohammed and Ali Fayed, had won a judicial review of the Home Secretary's decision to turn down their citizenship applications. The publican, Dennis Howells who has been championing the Fayeds' cause, hit the headlines in May when Mohammed Fayed arranged for a crate of Harrods beer to be delivered to the Inn as a thank you for their support.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: “The judges turned down an application for a judicial review at the end of February but said the Home Secretary’s decision did not have the "appearance of fairness" and that the "secrecy was unattractive". The judge said the Home Secretary should think again and reconsider. The Fayeds went to appeal and now Lord Woolf has ruled the Home Secretary should explain himself.”

“It is difficult not to conclude the citizenship applications were turned down for political reasons.” *more follows:*
HOWARD MUST SAY WHY HE IS REFUSING UK CITIZENSHIP TO AL FAYED BROTHERS

Note to Editors: The FT wrote on 14 May 1995: The Fayed brothers' dispute with the Government began in 1987 when the Department of Trade and Industry mounted an investigation of their takeover of the House of Fraser group. It came to a head last year, when Mr Mohammed Fayed alleged that two Conservative MPs - Mr Tim Smith and Mr Neil Hamilton - had asked Parliamentary questions on his behalf in exchange for cash and hospitality. Mr Smith resigned his post as a parliamentary private secretary; Mr Hamilton denied taking cash

for questions but quit his Ministerial job after details emerged of his stay at Mr Fayed's Ritz Hotel in Paris. Last October, Mr Howard rejected claims that he intervened in the citizenship applications made by the two brothers.

Note 2 to Editors: In October this year Neil Hamilton sensationally pulled out of an action against the Guardian newspaper. Hamilton dropped his libel action against the Guardian at the eleventh hour prompting the paper to denounce the former DTI Minister as a liar and a cheat. The Guardian stated as fact that Hamilton took thousands of pounds in cash from Fayed and accepted gifts and lavish hospitality.

For Immediate Release. No 359/96 Wed 13 November 1996

NHS WHITE PAPER A "PUBLICITY STUNT" SAYS MP

The government's health White Paper, released today, is largely a publicity exercise at taxpayers' expense, to benefit Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell's Tory leadership ambitions according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "It leaves the growing crisis in the NHS unchecked, threatening patients with longer waits. Instead of real solutions, the White Paper uses fictional cases of NHS best practice. There's nothing in this White Paper of any significance."

The MP added: "The mounting crisis in the NHS is rooted in the Tories' dogmatic market reforms. The cost of bureaucracy has doubled as a direct result of the internal market and annual contracts. A recent BMA paper estimated the additional financial burden at £1.7 billion a year. More than £4 million extra is spent *every day* on red tape - enough for 4,000 operations."

"Since 1989/90 annual spending on managerial and administrative staff has almost doubled from £1.2 billion to £2.3 billion. In 1995 spending on managers alone soared by £112 million, an inflation-busting rise of 18.3 per cent. There are 20,000 more senior managers and 50,000 fewer nurses in the NHS than before the Tory reforms."

"Labour's plan for the NHS tackles the problems at their roots. We will end the internal market, and have pledged to cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step, by releasing £100 million saved from cutting NHS red tape."

For Immediate Release. No 360/96 Thurs 14 November 1996

MP SCORNS "TORY TAXES"

Taxes will be higher at the coming election than in 1992 whatever the Chancellor does in his coming budget according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

As Labour launched its budget campaign on Tory taxes, the Pendle MP said: "For the last four elections the Conservative Party has made the central election issue their claim that Labour is irresponsible on tax, spending and borrowing. The economic issue in British politics for the coming election is very different.

"We can show in indisputable detail that whatever happens in the coming budget, taxes will be higher at the next election than at the last, in complete breach of all the Tories' promises."

"The Government has raised taxes 22 taxes since the last election, including a the rise in National Insurance contributions to 10 per cent, cutting the married couples' allowance in real terms on three occasions, cutting mortgage interest tax relief and, shamefully, putting VAT on fuel."

"So if the Chancellor cuts the basic rate of income tax by 2p, the typical family will still be paying almost £500 a year more in tax. If he cut the basic rate to 20p, the typical family would still be paying £200 more."

"Once again the Government is making costly promises on tax. On top of a 20p basic rate, which will cost £8 billion, they have committed themselves to abolishing Capital gains Tax - at a cost of £1.3 billion, abolishing Inheritance Tax - at a cost of £1.6 billion
Half of the benefit of these tax cuts would go to just 5,000 of the richest households in the country."

more follows:

MP SCORNS "TORY TAXES"

The Tories have not said where the money will come from for these tax cuts. Yet they also promise to "balance the budget in the medium term." There is no way they can deliver on their promises.

The MP added: "Inflation has soared, new figures show. The underlying rate of inflation for October rose from 2.9 to 3.3 per cent, the biggest rise since September 1993. The rise in the headline rate of inflation, including mortgage rates, was even steeper, from 2.1 to 2.7 per cent. This blows a new hole in the government's propaganda about being the "enterprise centre of Europe." On the contrary, Britain is now 11th out of 15 in the EU inflation league, and 11th in the EU interest rate league.

For Immediate Release. No 361/96 Mon 18 November 1996

SCHOOL STANDARDS SHOCK

Results from this summer's national curriculum tests for seven, 11 and 14 year olds show that there is still a huge gap to bridge, with over 40 per cent of all youngsters having a reading level or maths ability below that expected for their age.

Although test scores for 11 year olds improved in English and Maths, they still show that nearly half of eleven year olds are not reaching their expected level in those subjects. In English, 37% of 11 year olds have a reading age of nine or below. In Maths, 40% of all 11 year olds have an ability appropriate to children of nine or younger. In Science 38% of 11 year olds failed to reach the expected level.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "Of course I welcome that fact that there is now a closer relationship between teacher assessments and national tests and we all congratulate those who did well in this year's tests, and their teachers. However, there has been hardly any change in test results at 7 and 14, and there has been a worrying eight point drop in those achieving level four or above in science at eleven. That is a serious indictment of the Conservatives' record on educational standards."

"Labour wants to see all our children start secondary school able to read and write properly. We will raise standards in English and Maths through year-on-year targets for improvement at every stage in a child's education; greater use of specialist teaching in the three R's in primary schools and by cutting class sizes to 30 or under for all five, six and seven year olds using money saved from phasing out the Assisted Places Scheme."

For Immediate Release. No 362/96 Tues 19 November 1996

TOTAL BAN ON HANDGUNS DEFEATED

The House of Commons last night approved the Government's Firearms (Amendment) Bill which will outlaw the private possession of higher calibre hand guns. It will still be legal to own .22 calibre handguns.

Speaking after the vote, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said he was saddened by the vote. Angry Dunblane parents witnessed the proceedings from the public gallery.

The MP's colleagues, Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw and Shadow Scottish Secretary George Robertson said: "The 25 vote majority is an empty victory which leaves a glaring and dangerous loophole in the law. Labour is now the only party which can close that loophole. The Government has failed not just the people of Dunblane but all the millions who want handguns banned and who wanted this issue to be above politics."

The Pendle MP, who is a member of the committee considering the Bill, added: "Labour will bring forward legislation for a total ban at the earliest opportunity and will offer the free vote the Government denied its own MPs."

At the Labour conference in October, Tony Blair said: "I believe we should ban the private ownership and possession of handguns. That is our duty to the people of Dunblane."

Note to Editors: Labour's five MPs on the Home Affairs Select Committee called for a ban on the private ownership of handguns in July of this year, but were overruled by the six Tory MPs on the Committee - leading to a national storm of protest.

For Immediate Release. No 363/96 Tues 19 November 1996

GOVERNMENT "PLAYING POLITICS" WITH UNIONS

The Government is again playing politics with industrial relations according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims today's Green Paper proposes, amongst other things, to allow private individuals and companies to sue trade unions for "disproportionate" losses incurred as a result of industrial action.

The MP said: "These measures are unnecessary, unworkable, and unwanted by business. Similar measures were proposed by the Conservatives in a 1981 Green Paper and in their 1983 election manifesto, but not acted on."

"Our position on industrial relations is clear. Trade unions will get fairness but not favours from a Labour government.

- People should have the right to join - or not to join - a trade union, and unions should be recognised where a majority of employees want one.

- The key elements of the trade union legislation of the 1980s - on ballots, picketing and industrial action - will stay.

The MP added: "We recently proposed new measures to improve the arbitration and conciliation process."

For Immediate Release. No 364/96 Tues 19 November 1996

NORTH WEST GROUP ELECTS PENDLE MP AS CHAIR

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, was tonight elected to chair the North West Group of Labour MPs.

The Parliamentary Group brings together on a regular basis Labour MPs representing constituencies in the North West of England. It is the largest regional group.

The MP said: "I am delighted to be chosen by my Parliamentary colleagues to chair the North West Group in this crucially important General Election year. The North West will play its part in delivering a Labour victory."

For Immediate Release. No 365/96 Wed 20 November 1996

MP "DISMAY" AT JOHN WILMAN JOB LOSSES

News that the Pendle based home furnishing firm, John Wilman, is to shed 60 jobs has been greeted with dismay by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster last night after the story had broken in the press, the MP said: "I had heard rumours that redundancies were on the cards and now these reports have, unfortunately, been confirmed. It will be a dreadful Christmas for everyone at the company."

The MP added: "The company has grown spectacularly in recent years and this reversal in its fortunes is very bad news indeed."

"I shall be contacting the company to see what, if anything, can be done."

For Immediate Release. No 366/96 Wed 20 November 1996

£58million - THE COST OF 22 TAX RISES IN PENDLE!

Conservative tax rises since the last General Election have cost people in Pendle a staggering £58 million according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

With only a week to go before the Budget, the MP's figures will cause alarm in the Conservative camp.

The MP said: "The figures come from an analysis by the scrupulously impartial House of Commons Library which has calculated the effect of tax changes since the last General Election in Britain as a whole. The national figures have been apportioned to each parliamentary constituency depending on the number of electors it contains."

"In Pendle, tax changes since the March 1993 Budget - the first after the General Election - have cost voters a hefty £58m. On average each elector has coughed up an extra £898 in taxes."

The MP added: "The Conservatives promised to cut tax at the last election. Instead they raised taxes 22 times. These extra taxes are equivalent to an income tax rise of 7p in the pound. We've seen the biggest tax hike in Britain's peace time history."

For Immediate Release. No 367/96 Thurs 21 November 1996

MP BACKS SELF DETERMINATION FOR KASHMIR

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told a rally at Westminster today that he was backing the call for a plebiscite in Kashmir to allow the people living there to decide their own future. Part of Kashmir is regarded by India as its sovereign territory.

The rally was supported by the Jammu and Kashmir Welfare Association of Pendle.

The MP told the meeting that Kashmir would be a top priority for an incoming Labour Government. He said: "Many of my constituents have strong family or business ties with Kashmir and they have been devastated by the regular reports we get of human rights abuses by the Indian Army."

The MP added: "Their was clear evidence of coercion and intimidation of voters in the Indian General Election in Kashmir last May and this colours our views on the legitimacy of the result. A majority of Kashmiris boycotted the elections. Over in Pakistan the situation is very difficult. Things are very unstable at the moment following the dismissal of the Bhutto Government by the President. I hope the elections promised for early next year will go ahead as planned."

For Immediate Release. No 368/96 Wed 20 November 1996

MP NAILS CONSERVATIVE LIES ON LABOUR'S SPENDING PLANS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today accused Government Ministers of inventing stories about Labour's spending plans. Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "The Tories lied about tax and spending in 1992. They lied about Labour's plans and they lied about their own plans. Today, they are at it again, making bogus claims about Labour. The Tories' claim that civil servants had carried out the exercise was today demolished by Sir Robin Butler, Head of the Home Civil service."

"What we are seeing is the same old Tory lie machine. No wonder people don't trust them. They don't believe a word they say. The Chancellor himself said that the public would be "deeply suspicious" of the Tories on tax. These 89 new Tory lies on top of the 22 Tory tax rises prove he is absolutely right."

Note to Editors: Labour has published its programme for government, *New Labour, New Life for Britain.* Every commitment is costed. Ideas or proposals referred to in speeches are not promises or spending commitments made by the party. The nine Labour spending commitments amounting to £30 billion identified by the Conservatives, include:

•Lie. Labour will abolish the NHS internal market, at a cost of £450m.
•Fact, This is a lie. By scrapping the internal market Labour will make savings and divert resources to front line patient services. The BMA estimate the extra cost of the internal market at £1.7 billion a year.

•**Lie:** Labour will provide sabbaticals for long-serving teachers, at a cost of £1.3 billion
•**Fact,** Labour has stated only that we will *examine* the feasibility of teachers sabbaticals through the GEST programme. We have not committed to offering sabbaticals to all long serving teachers, nor to expanding the GEST budget for 1996/97 of £155 million. Any sabbaticals will be paid for out of existing resources, as reported in the FT, 12/4/96.

more follows

MP NAILS CONSERVATIVE LIES
ON LABOUR'S SPENDING PLANS

•**Lie.** Labour will increase spending on house building by £2.6 billion
•**Fact** This is a lie. Labour's spending on house building will come out of phased release of the £5 billion from the sale of council homes currently locked in local authorities' bank accounts.

•**Lie,** Labour will abolish the 16-hour rule - limiting hours of study for those on benefit - at a cost of £875 million.
•**Fact.** This is a lie. This measure, which applies only to young unemployed people, will be paid for entirely by Labour's windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised utilities.

•**Lie,** Labour will end crude council tax capping, at a cost of £1.2 billion
•**Fact,** This is a lie. The reality is that council taxes are rising across Britain as a conscious part of government policy by 6.2 per cent in England this year and by 8 per cent, according to William Waldegrave's own admission, in 1996/97.

The attack on Labour is being led by William Waldegrave, the minister who says that it is OK. for ministers to lie. Waldegrave told the Commons Civil Service Committee in March 1994 that "in exceptional circumstances, it is necessary to say something untrue in the House of Commons."

For Immediate Release. No 369/96 Wed 20 November 1996

CRISIS AS LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS GO "INTO THE RED"

A staggering 63 schools in Lancashire are running deficits where their outgoings are outstripping their income. This is 10% of the total number of schools in the county.

The shock figure was revealed to Lancashire MPs at Westminster today by an all-Party deputation from the County's Education Committee - led by Committee Chair Councillor Stan Wright - who were on their way to meet Education Minister, Robin Squire.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who met the deputation, commented: "The balances held by individual schools are fast disappearing. These balances were never intended to meet any shortfall arising from, say, the teachers' pay awards but that is precisely what is happening. These balances should be regarded as money in the bank to be used, for example, for special projects dear to the heart of the school. As it is, they are being raided just to keep the show on the road."

"The same thing is happening all over the country and I have asked the Education Secretary to spell out, for each education authority in the country, how many schools are projected to go into the red this year - and how many are already there."

Note to Editors: Schools by law are not permitted to run a deficit. In extremis, Governors could face surcharge. The Local Education Authority can also suspend delegation.

For Immediate Release. No 370/96 Thurs 21 November 1996

MP SLATES GOVERNMENT FOR NEGLECTING PENDLE'S YOUNG UNEMPLOYED

Unemployment among young people under 25 in Pendle is costing £4,409,840 a year - enough to put extra police on the beat and install CCTV where it is needed says the area's MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking at Westminster, the MP said: "With the Budget just around the corner we need to ask what the Government is doing for young people. Unemployment in those under 25 is rising - increasing nationally by 123,000 from 656,000 to 779,000 between the final quarter of last year and the summer of this year according to the Government's own Labour Force Survey."

"The annual cost to the nation of youth unemployment is now over £6 billion - equivalent to almost 4p on the basic rate of income tax."

"The Government needs to get a grip. Its policies are costing the nation its future. That is why Labour has given a firm pledge to get 250,000

young people off benefit and into work by using money from a windfall levy on the privatised utilities."

Note to Editors: There are 554 young people under 25 out of work in Pendle and claiming benefit.

For Immediate Release. No 371/96 Thurs 21 November 1996

GIVE THE BIRDS A BREAK SAYS PRENTICE

The Government isn't doing enough to reverse declining bird populations in England according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

In the Commons today he told Agriculture Minister, Tony Baldry, that the Government should extend the Organic Aid Scheme to help farmers who have always farmed organically rather than just those who convert from intensive to organic. The MP said the present scheme was useful but only helped a tiny number of farmers.

Speaking after the Commons exchange, the MP said: "Birds are a beautiful part of our natural environment but all over England the fields are falling silent as modern agricultural methods deal a death blow to our feathered friends."

"We haven't heard a squawk out of the Government about this. Birds thrive where there is organic farming and Ministers should do all they can to promote it."

Note to Editors: The Organic Aid Scheme opened for applications in August 1994. The scheme is voluntary and offers financial help to those conventional farmers and growers who wish to convert to organic farming methods. It offers no help to existing organic farmers.

For Immediate Release. No 372/96 Wed 27 November 1996

BENEFITS AGENCY TO CUT OPENING TIMES OF BARLICK OFFICE

The Benefits Agency is to close its public caller office in Barnoldswick on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in a drive to cut costs. The office which was open five mornings per week will, as from next month, open on Mondays and Fridays only - but with extended opening hours. The office will open from 9.30am to 12 noon and 1pm to 3.30pm.

The Benefits Agency say the move will cut costs following a drop in the number of callers. The Agency says that with the introduction of the Jobseeker's Allowance, Barlickers signing on in Colne use the Benefits Agency office there too.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been critical of the proposals. The MP said: "The closure and reduction in opening hours of these Public Caller Offices will make it more difficult for people without access to private transport and without a phone. This is yet another example of a public service being withdrawn for reasons of "efficiency" and "cost cutting". Barnoldswick isn't an insignificant little hamlet. The idea that people should have to traipse over to Colne is a nonsense."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP wrote to the Benefits Agency on 11 November as follows: "Thank you for your letter about the changes in the opening hours and the other arrangements affecting the Public Caller Offices in Colne and Barnoldswick."

I have to say that my first reaction is one of profound scepticism, in that the new arrangements seem to come more from a desire to mesh together the Benefits Agency and Employment Service than with the needs of the public... I am sure there will be many people who will look on these proposals and say that it is another public service that is being lost to Barnoldswick, a medium sized town... You say in your penultimate

paragraph that unemployed people living in Barnoldswick do have to claim benefit in Colne. That is indeed the case and I am sure it poses no end of problems for people who have to wait for public transport to take them to Colne. It is also the case that these people do not receive any recompense for the cost of travelling from Barnoldswick to Colne, an issue I raised with Ministers some time ago."

Note 2 to Editors: The Benefits Agency has been required by the Government to reduce its administrative costs by 25% during the 3 years to March 1999. In the period April to October 1996, 16 Public Caller offices were closed and 2 had their opening hours reduced. From November 1996 to March 1999, 17 Public caller offices are currently scheduled to close and 3 are scheduled to have their opening hours reduced. (Source Benefits Agency. Letter from Peter Mathison, Chief Executive, to Pendle MP dated 11 November).

For Immediate Release. No 373/96. 6.45pm Tues 26 Nov 96

PENDLE MP SLAMS "FRAUDULENT" BUDGET

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, tonight hit out at the Government's last Budget before the General Election, labelling it as "fraudulent". Speaking at Westminster as the Chancellor sat down, the MP said: "The Budget confirms that people have paid over £2,120 more in tax since the last election. As widely predicted, the Chancellor cut the basic rate of Income Tax by 1p. But if he had cut it by 4p a typical family would still be paying more in tax than at the last election! It is a typical Tory con trick that we are now totally familiar with."

"The Chancellor is banking on getting billions from closing "tax loopholes" - which he previously denied ever existed. And he will be borrowing £26.5 billion when he forecast before it would be £6 billion. As a nation we will be spending £25 billion this year in servicing the national debt which John Major has doubled during his time as Prime Minister. This is the equivalent of spending on Defence and Education combined!"

"There was no mention in the Chancellor's speech of the cuts in nursery education (£56m) or in training (£34m) or in the NHS capital programme which is to be slashed by 10%. He trumpeted the PFI hospital deal which was signed yesterday - the only one so far when he predicted 12 this time last year. The entire Budget was a typical sleight of hand designed to fool the British public. But they won't fall for it."

"Everyone can do the sums: 7p up, 2p down leaves people 5 pence in the pound worse off because of higher taxes. The nation will be paying more tax next year. overall tax take will be up by £300 million. The party that fought the last election on reducing tax is taxing us more."

"On health, the Tories have broken their pledge to increase spending on the NHS over and above inflation year on year. Spending on the NHS is set to fall by 0.7 per cent in real terms the

year after the election. And the 16 per cent real cut in capital investment has not been matched by PFI. Tory promises on health will not be believed because they are failing to cut NHS bureaucracy and lift the threat hanging over casualty wards."

"On education the Department's budget is set to fall in real terms by 5.5 per cent over the next three years. Government targets for spending on education are £73 million less than local authorities are already spending this year, and there are cuts in the training and

university capital spending budgets. Tory promises on education will not be believed because they are failing to put more teachers in the classroom."

The MP continued: "Britain's economy is not equipped for the future. That is why we have fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league and why we do not have a recovery that will last. Like previous Tory budgets, this one fails to address those problems. We are 42nd in the world skills league and invest less per worker than any of our major competitors. Far from being the "enterprise capital of Europe", Britain has suffered economic decline under the Tories since 1979, with the slowest average growth rate of any major industrialised nation. One in five households is without work - higher than Germany, France and the US."

"We needed a Budget to tackle the investment and technology gap with our competitors. A Budget for jobs - that helps people move from welfare to work, by shifting resources from welfare to education - as Labour's windfall levy on the utilities will. We needed a Budget for fairness. The priority should have been to cut VAT on fuel - the fairest tax cut. We will cut VAT on fuel from 8% to 5%, and this will be in our manifesto."

Note to Editors: The Budget main points (as reported by PA):

INCOME TAX: 1p off the basic rate to 23p. £280 increase in personal allowance. Married couples and related allowances up by £40 - worth £275 to each married couple. Tax allowance for blind up by rate of inflation. Threshold for higher rate tax of 40% - up £600. Lower 20p tax band raised by £200

PETROL: Petrol and diesel up 3p a litre - 13.5p per gallon.
Road fuel gases duty cut by 25%. CAR TAX: Car tax up £5 to £145. Lorry tax frozen. TOBACCO: tax on 20 cigarettes to rise by 15p, 7p on small cigars and about 8p on pipe tobacco. Handrolling tobacco limited to rate of inflation. ALCOHOL: Beer and wine unchanged. Spirits duty cut by 4% - 26p a bottle. Alcopops to face 40% increase in tax - 7p to 8p a bottle - from January.

PENDLE MP SLAMS "FRAUDULENT" BUDGET (3)

ECONOMY: Forecast to grow 2.5% this year and 3.5% next year. Consumer spending forecast to rise by 4% next year. Business investment forecast to grow by almost 10%. Export volumes forecast to rise by more than 7% this year and 6% next year. Aiming to meet

Maastricht debt and deficit criteria required for entry into single currency by 1997 - "but staying out" at the moment.

PRICES: Underlying inflation forecast to meet 2.5% target or less. Public borrowing to be £26.5 billion this year - and £19 billion next year and broadly in balance by 1999-2000.

TAX: Customs right to backdate underpaid tax claims restricted to three years. Spend to Save scheme - more money to clampdown on benefit fraud. £800 million to be spent over next three years to secure saving of over six times as much - £6.7 billion. Moves under scheme to include tax experts to be redeployed to target big companies paying low tax. More measures to stem black economy. More Customs officers to tackle VAT and smuggling of alcohol and tobacco. Clampdown on paying employees in company shares.
Profit Related Pay tax relief affecting 3.7 million people to be withdrawn gradually. £4,000 upper limit to stay until 1998. From 2000 year to be withdrawn entirely. Capital allowances for plant and machinery cut to 6% for companies spending over £100,000. Insurance premium tax up 2.5% to 4% from April 1997. Airport tax doubled - £5 to £10 for European flights and £10 to £20 for rest of world.

CAPITAL GAINS TAX: No change. INHERITANCE TAX: Threshold raised to £215,000 - from £200,000.

NATIONAL INSURANCE: Main rate of employers' National Insurance contributions cut to 10% from April 1997. Upper and lower NICs threshholds for employers and employees increased by £10 and £1 respectively.

BUSINESS RATES: Freeze next years rate for small businesses who would have faced increases - up to £130 a year benefit.

EDUCATION: Spending on schools up by £830 million next year. £50 million extra for fabric of school buildings. £280 million to boost further and higher education over next two years - including £20 million next year for science equipment. Sale of student loans debt.

LAW AND ORDER: Spending on police and prisons to be up £450 million next year, 2,000 more PCs by next year and on course for target of 5,000 more beat police. HEALTH: Spending on patient services to increase by £1.6 billion or 2.9% in real terms next year. Three per cent real increase over and above inflation on hospital spending.

SOCIAL SECURITY: Growth of 1.5% in social security spending. Housing benefit and council benefit changes. Move to align benefits to couples

and single parents after April 1998 for new applicants. Work pilots to be extended into 28 new areas. Extra £100 million to help long-term unemployed back to work.

For Immediate Release. No 374/96 Wed 27 November 1996

PRENTICE CONDEMNS 19TH HIKE IN PRESCRIPTION CHARGES AS "A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW"

News that the Government is to jack up prescription charges by 15p - putting the cost up to £5.65p - has been condemned by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The increase follows the one in February which hiked prescription charges to £5.50p. In 1994 there was a 11.6% increase taking the charge to £4.75. In March 1993 prescription charges were pushed up by 13% to £4.25.

Speaking at Westminster today the MP hit out at the increase: "This is the 19th increase in prescription charges since 1979 when they stood at 20p. Today's prescriptions cost more than 28 times the amount under the last Labour Government. Even after discounting inflation over this period, prescriptions are 11 times more expensive than they used to be."

"The Conservative record on health is enough to make anyone feel sick" said the MP.

ends

For Immediate Release. No 375/96 Thurs 28 November 1996

COUNCIL TAX SET TO RISE

The Council Tax in Pendle is set to rise next year as a direct result of the Government's Budget according to local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Yesterday in the Commons, Environment Secretary, John Gummer, told MP's how much money was to be allocated to councils nation-wide in 1997/8. The settlement reveals that Pendle Council will be allowed to spend an extra £2,000 next year - effectively a standstill budget. Lancashire County Council has been permitted a 2.2% increase. The County Fire Authority will receive a 4% increase in its SSA (Standard Spending Assessment or the amount the Government thinks it right to spend) which closes the gap slightly between what the Government

says should be spent and what is actually being spent. At present, there is a 10% difference.

The MP commented: "The increase in the Fire SSA is welcome but Lancashire County Council will still have to find money to bridge the gap. My local council is undoubtedly going to find things difficult but I hope they are not going to minimise the problems facing the County. Labour controlled Lancashire and Liberal controlled Pendle are in precisely the same boat."

The MP added: "The Government's own figures show they plan to force Council Tax payers to cough up an extra £4 billion in Council Tax over the next three years. That is equal to putting over 2p on the standard rate of income tax. It is the equivalent of £200 extra for each household over the next three years."

For Immediate Release. No 376/96 Wed 27 November 1996

THE LAST GASP BUDGET: article for publication

The Conservatives delivered their last gasp budget on Tuesday, in an effort to claw back support from the people they have hit so hard since 1992. It won't work. Nobody trusts their promises or boasts, because the memory is so recent of how they cynically lied about tax before the last election.

Mr Clarke's Budget is a classic example of giving a little with one hand and taking away a lot with the other. One difference is that what he is taking away - the indirect taxes, like 13p on a gallon of petrol - took effect immediately, while the penny off the standard rate of income tax won't take effect until next April.

Nobody will be fooled by the Chancellor's Budget: it leaves ordinary families worse off. A typical family will have paid over £2,120 more in tax since the last election as a result of the 22 tax increases since 1992.

It's not only the seven tax rises contained in the Budget and accompanying documents which will have to be paid for. These are bad enough. They include an increase in insurance premium tax from 2.5 to 4 per cent, and yet another hike, 15p this time, in prescription charges. And a family going on holiday will face up to £40 extra in airport tax.

But beneath even that unattractive surface, there are the cuts in support for local authority services which the Tories admit will force

council tax payers to cough up a total of £4 billion over the next three years - the equivalent of £200 for each household.

Contrary to all the hype, taxes have not fallen since 1979. The burden has just been transferred from direct to indirect taxes -

THE LAST GASP BUDGET

particularly VAT - and from the very rich to the poor and those in the middle. The Chancellor refused to cut VAT on fuel from eight to five per cent, as Labour had urged. Since 1992, taxes have soared for virtually everyone and this Budget does very little to reverse that trend.

But the deceptions in this Budget don't end there. The Chancellor boasted about spending more on education, but is cutting the cash available to the local authorities which provide schools for the great majority of our children. Indeed, the planned figure for school spending is actually £73 million less than what is actually being spent today. Some "increase"!

It's the same story on the National Health Service. While trumpeting their devotion to the NHS - which, given half a chance, they would sell off bit by bit - the detailed Tory plans actually show that the health budget is set to fall by 0.7 per cent in real terms the year after the election.

There is nothing in this Budget to help the unemployed, or to bridge the yawning gap in investment between Britain and our competitors. There is nothing to help people off benefit and into work - in fact this budget gets rid of the single parent benefit that lone parents could claim while getting back into work.

It's time for a new direction, new priorities and new hope for Britain. The nation needs budgets that work for the many, not just the few. That can only mean showing this Government the door. We've had 17 years of Tory budgets since 1979, and for the sake of all our people, this must be the last.

Gordon Prentice MP

For Immediate Release. No 377/96 Thurs 28 November 1996

MP CALLS FOR AN END TO WASTE IN THE CAP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today called for major reforms to the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The MP was speaking at Westminster as the Opposition published its policy statement "Reforming the Common Agricultural Policy".

The MP, a member of the Agriculture Select Committee, said: "In 17 years this Government has made no serious attempt to get fundamental change to the CAP. The CAP budget has grown by over half in real terms since 1979. It now costs the typical British family more than £200 a year extra in tax.

The Tories signed up to the "set-aside" system, which will pay out £223 million this year to farmers in the UK *not* to grow crops. Some arable farmers receive over £500,000 each."

"The CAP has failed in its stated objective of protecting our food and farming industries, and encourages farming practices that damage our countryside. We need to cut out the waste of CAP and secure far better value for taxpayers' money. We need to phase out state-intervention buying and export subsidies and work for reform in the CAP so that it provides fair and effective support to farmers and farm workers, and regenerates the rural economy."

"What we are saddled with at the moment is worse than useless."

For Immediate Release. No 378/96 Wed 4 December 1996

MP CALLS FOR TIGHTER CONTROLS ON AIRGUNS

Airguns can be lethal weapons and should be licensed says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says it is "quite absurd" for people as young as 14 to have access to such weapons.

The MP, who is serving on the Committee on the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, also wants tighter controls on replica firearms.

The MP said: "Airguns can cause absolute mayhem in the wrong hands. I have a file full of stories from local newspapers around the country telling of dreadful injuries inflicted by air weapons. People are not the only victims. Cats are prime targets along with ducks and swans."

The MP added: "There are next to no controls on replica weapons which can cause as much fear and anxiety as the real thing. The law needs to be tightened up dramatically."

Note to Editors: The Firearms (Amendment) Bill which will outlaw the possession of handguns over .22 calibre returns to the floor of the House of Commons today.

For Immediate Release. No 379/96 Fri 29 November 1996

MP BACKS DISABILITY RIGHTS

RIGHTS NOW - a coalition of organisations representing disabled people - will be lobbying Parliament on Monday (2 December) to protest at the inadequacies of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The lobby falls on the day on which the Act's provisions relating to employment, goods and services come into force.

Rights Now wants the next Government to set up a Disability Rights Commission within the first year on the new Parliament.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who will meet the lobbyists on Monday, will say: "Labour supports comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work. Disabled people have always been at the back of the queue so far as this Government is concerned."

"An incoming Labour Government will not repeal the Disability Discrimination Act - there is no need to start from scratch. But sections of it will, of course, be amended or superseded by new legislation. Disability discrimination needs to be knocked on the head once and for all. It is simply unacceptable."

For Immediate Release. No 380/96 Wed 4 December 1996

MP PRESSES FOR MORE NURSERY PLACES IN BARLICK

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has renewed his call for more nursery places in Barnoldswick. He is pressing Lancashire County Council to look again at the situation in West Craven. The only nursery in the town is at Gisburn Road School.

The MP's move was prompted by an approach from the Head of Coates Lane Primary School, Mrs Sue Holloway, who says the area is crying out

for nursery provision. The MP said: "The early years are vitally important. Children thrive in nursery education. Lancashire already spends more on education than the Government believes it should and the County is feeling the pinch financially. But it is a simple fact that there is inadequate nursery provision in West Craven. It is something we've got to tackle."

“It is easy to point the finger of blame at the County but the Government is the real culprit. The ridiculous voucher scheme has everything to do with the delivery of a right-wing agenda and nothing to do with the delivery of a quality nursery education for West Craven's children. A change of Government will see all three and four year olds, whose parents want it, have access to quality nursery education. We will use the £185 million of new money pledged to the voucher scheme to provide a guarantee of a place for four year olds. We will set targets to extend it to the three year olds currently excluded from the Government's scheme.”

Note to Editors: Coates Lave Primary was inspected by OFSTED last month. The initial report of the inspectors is very positive.

For Immediate Release. No 381/96 Thurs 5 December 1996

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP at the PPWA, 23/25 Market Square, Nelson on Saturday 7 December at 4.30pm

NEW COMPUTER WORKSHOP AT THE PPWA

The PPWA is setting up a Computer Workshop aimed at getting girls up to speed with the new technology. The BBC's Children in Need helped fund the workshop.

For Immediate Release. No 382/96 Tues 3 December 1996

BUDGET PROMISES ON EDUCATION DON'T ADD UP

The fall out from the Budget in Lancashire's schools could be immensely damaging says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. "If schools were to spend next year what the Government wants them to spend then spending would be cut nation-wide by £41 per pupil."

The MP continued: "The Government's claim that the Budget provides extra money for education is simply untrue. They have told councils

they can spend more but without giving them the money! Here in Lancashire the County Council is spending £18.8m (6.5%) more on education this year than the Government believes it should. Last year (1995/6) the County spent £22.2m (7.5%) more on education than the Government wanted it to. And the year before that, it was £28.5m more."

"The squeeze on Lancashire has been tight and with LMS individual schools are now going into the red. No fewer than 39 primary schools and 24 secondary schools are moving into deficit."

"Over the past four years Lancashire has spent £91.3m more on funding the country's education service than the Government thought right. Now Ministers have the brass neck to claim the credit for increased spending on education."

Note to editors: An all Party deputation from the County Education Committee met Pendle MP Gordon Prentice and Burnley MP Peter Pike on 20 November. They went on to see Education Minister Robin Squire. He was unable to give them any assurances about the future funding of education in Lancashire.

For Immediate Release. No 383/96 Tues 3 December 1996

GOVERNMENT IN "SHAMBLES" says PRENTICE

The Tories are floundering badly even though the general election is no more than five months away, according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "Every day they deliver a crop of crises, gaffes, and internal squabbles. Today, for example, there are at least ten such crises and gaffes. It's pantomime time at Westminster."

Note to Editors:

•"The Guardian opinion poll gives Labour 19-pt. lead at 50 per cent. Less than a third of those interviewed believe Budget will make them better off

• Europe. Clarke and the anti-Europeans trade blows over the single currency, while Major's spin doctors let it be known that Major will switch position before election

• TV debate - The Conservatives have dropped plans for an election TV debate after fears that Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown would "go for the prime minister like wolves"

• **Nursery vouchers** - more proof that scheme is unworkable as LEA in Borehamwood has to exclude 3 year olds from nurseries; parents protest
• **Nicholas Scott** - disgraced Tory MP deselected - despite Mawhinney and other senior Tories writing in his support
• **Waldegrave gaffe** - "angry" Major demands explanation for admission that taxes are up
• **Economy** - CBI warning on high pound and exports, more pressure to raise interest rates
• **Willetts** - Paymaster General David Willetts signals he will resign if censured over his role in the Neil Hamilton cash-for-questions scandal
• **Sleaze** - Local Government Ombudsman report discloses "extensive" links between freemasons and Tory Party in Castle Point, Essex
• **E-coli poisoning**- yet another public health disaster rumbles on, Forsyth flounders.

For Immediate Release. No 384/96 Tues 3 December 1996

HEALTH SHAKE-UP IS JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

GP fundholding is on the way out according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says Labour's new system of GP commissioning - which will replace GP fundholding - will benefit all patients, not just a few. It will be funded entirely from savings within the existing system.

Speaking at Westminster as the Party announced its plans for an improved NHS family doctor service, the MP said: "Under GP Commissioning, general practitioners will work together in groups to improve local services. This will replace the current bureaucratic system of individual practices competing against each other."

"GP commissioning ensures all patients have access to treatment on the basis of need. It will allow all GPs to send their patients to the hospital of their choice and it cuts down on bureaucracy and form filling and will save money."

Shadow Health Secretary Chris Smith added: "GP commissioning will ensure fair funding for all general practices. Labour has no quarrel with those GPs who have taken up fundholding. It is the system of fundholding which is unsustainable - it is expensive to run and has created a two-tier service."

For Immediate Release. No 385/96 Tues 10 December 1996

MP GIVES THUMBS DOWN TO GREENFIELD DEVELOPMENT

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says the plans by Graham White to develop land in Colne at the end of the M65 motorway should be kicked into touch by Pendle Council.

The MP told a meeting of local residents on Saturday that the outline planning application was short on detail but the thinking behind it was readily apparent. "What is being proposed is retail use which falls squarely outside the permitted uses set out in the council's own local plan. The Council also owns some of the land earmarked for the development and this gives it extra leverage."

The MP added: "Mr White's planning application is a flyer. It shouldn't get off the ground."

For Immediate Release. No 386/96 Thurs 5 December 1996

MP CONDEMNS WAR PENSIONS CUT

The Government's tax-raising budget unravelled further today as it was revealed that the government has disguised a £5O million package of cuts in war pensions as "proposals to simplify policy and procedures." The changes in a range of benefits will hit up to 10,000 war pensioners and a further 10,000 deaf war veterans.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice expressed outrage. Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "The Conservative MP Winston Churchill is absolutely right in calling today for the resignation of Chief Secretary to the Treasury William Waldegrave over the affair." Churchill told BBC Radio 4. *"The minister responsible, who appears to be the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, should resign. It's cheap, it's nasty, and utterly unworthy. Someone who has so little regard for our war heroes should not be in government."*

The pensions shock comes the day after the government made new concessions to gun owners hit by tightening of gun laws. The government will pay out £150m in compensation, while saving £5Om on disabled war veterans' pensions. "You get a much better deal from this Government if you pick up a gun for fun than picking one up for your country."

Note to Editors: The pensions plan is just the latest scandal in William Waldegrave's long record of double-talk and deception. He is the man who told the Commons Civil Service Committee in March 1994 that in exceptional circumstances, it is necessary to say something untrue in the House of Commons. He refused to resign after the Scott Report on the arms-to-Iraq scandal. In February 1996 it criticised him for deliberately misleading the House on at least 12 occasions. He admitted last weekend that the average person was £50 a year worse off in direct taxes alone since 1992.

For Immediate Release. No 387/96 Tues 10 December 1996

PENDLE MP HAILS "UNIVERSITY FOR INDUSTRY"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, welcomed the launch today of Labour's plans for a University for Industry. At just under 50%, the MP's East Lancashire constituency has a higher percentage of the workforce employed in manufacturing than any constituency in the country.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "The University for Industry is central to Labour's commitment to invest as a nation in our knowledge-based potential. It will boost the skills of both individuals and businesses. The University will work with the Open University and with other private and public sector bodies to bring a broad range of skills to the workplace from the most basic to the most advanced level."

Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown added: "The University for Industry must play a key role in Labour's mission to equip our economy for the future and create an educated economy - which will meet our ambition of creating the best educated and best skilled workforce, which we need if Britain is to compete successfully in the next century."

Shadow Employment and Education Secretary David Blunkett said: "We have a poorer skills base than countries such as Germany or the Asian tigers - as the government's Skills Audit admitted. Countries like Singapore recognise already the importance of modern technology to help create a learning society. The University for Industry could be accessed via the internet at home, using CD ROMs at work, through learning centres in local shopping centres and libraries."

For Immediate Release. No 388/96 Mon 9 December 1996

LIB DEM FIRE ENGINE CAMPAIGN IS "BURNT OUT" says PENDLE MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has ridiculed attempts by Pendle's Liberal Democrats to resurrect the scare story that Lancashire County Council is poised to axe one fire engine apiece in Colne and Barnoldswick.

The MP commented: "I believe this old chestnut is to be pulled out of the fire again at the County Council meeting tomorrow night. Pendle's Liberals are never happier than when they are making people feel anxious about "threatened" cuts to fire cover. There is no question in my mind but that these fire engines are as safe as the gold in the Bank of England."

"The Chief Fire Officer has made the position absolutely clear in a recent letter to the press. No matter where you live in Lancashire, two pumps will be sent to every building fire. This is not the case everywhere in the country. Take, for example, Liberal Democrat controlled Somerset where day time cover in C and D risk areas is restricted to one pump. Our local Liberals would be better employed persuading their colleagues in Somerset to come up to the standards we have set here in Lancashire."

"Pendle's Liberal Democrats showed their true colours recently by refusing to press the Home Secretary to review the Home Office Minimum Standards of Fire Cover. They are only interested in trying to score pathetic political points at the expense of the County Council."

For Immediate Release. No 389/96 Wed 11 December 1996

GULF WAR SYNDROME

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has blasted Government Ministers over their handling of the "Gulf War Syndrome" - the mystery illness that afflicted thousands of veterans. Yesterday, Armed Forces minister Nicholas Soames was forced to admit that he had misled the House of Commons over the issue. Prentice has crossed swords with Soames on a number of occasions over RAF fast jets flying low over his Pendle constituency.

The Pendle MP said: "I have constituents who fought in the Gulf so I know what they went through. The Minister admitted yesterday that he had misled the House over the use of organo-phosphate chemicals in the Gulf war. The government will now fund two studies, one into

veterans' fertility and birth defects in their children, and one into a variety of illnesses they suffer including chronic fatigue, memory loss and depression."

"This is a welcome announcement, but it comes far too late - we have been calling for such studies for three years. Once again the government's record on war veterans is exposed as shabby and dishonest. Last week they were trying to cheat thousands of veterans of their pensions and benefits. This week they finally notice the veterans whose health problems they dismissed for years."

Labour shadow defence secretary David Clark added: "Since allegations of Gulf war syndrome came to the fore, we have called on the government to honour its commitment to veterans. The Government's failure to act earlier has led to three years of uncertainty and suffering for our troops."

For Immediate Release. No 390/96 Wed 11 December 1996

E COLI OUTBREAK HITS PENDLE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today asked Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, to look urgently into the E Coli outbreak in Pendle and to make all the resources available that may be needed to track down the source of the infection.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "I am extremely concerned about this. This bug - E Coli - is super virulent and highly dangerous. I know that my local Council will be pulling out all the stops as will the East Lancashire Health Authority."

The MP, who lives in Barnoldswick, added: "I understand most of the reported cases are in West Craven but there are some in other parts of Pendle. The whole business is immensely worrying."

For Immediate Release. No 391/96 Thurs 12 December 1996

TAXES UP - AND IT'S OFFICIAL SAYS MP

Treasury figures published today show that the taxes for ordinary families have risen dramatically under John Major's government. The typical family is paying more than two pence in the pound more in total taxes than at the last election.

The total tax burden for an average family, defined as a married couple with two children and one earner making the average male earnings of £395.50 a week, will rise to 35.11 per cent of their gross income in 1997/98 - up from 32.7 per cent in 1992-93. Most of the rise comes from increases in indirect taxation, although direct taxes have also risen by 1/2 per cent.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Ministers have been forced to come clean and admit that taxes have gone up since the last election. People are paying more tax on income, more tax on spending and more tax in total, after 22 tax rises costing a typical family over £2,000."

Note to Editors: According to the Treasury figures.

A typical family will pay £109 more in direct tax at the next election than at the last confirming William Waldegrave's admission 10 days ago that direct taxes have risen

A typical family will pay £515 a year more in total taxes - direct and indirect - than in 1992

Families are paying more tax today than in 1979 under the last Labour government. The total tax burden on a typical family has risen three pence in the pound, from 32.2% of gross income in 1979 to 35.1% today.

For Immediate Release. No 392/96 Thurs 12 December 1996

"CASH FOR QUESTIONS" SCANDAL CLAIMS ANOTHER SCALP says PENDLE MP

David Willetts' resignation over his role in the cash-for-questions scandal is being depicted by the Government as doing the "decent thing." But, according to local MP Gordon Prentice, he deserves no credit for any of his conduct in the affair. The MP said: "Coming on the day that the Conservatives plunged into further bitter squabbling over Europe, his disgrace simply offers further proof that they are utterly unfit to govern."

"Willetts is the latest in a long line of Tory Ministers whose arrogant, high-handed and deceitful behaviour has been their downfall. His deceptions and his resignation are typical of the failure of leadership in John Major's government. His is the 16th such resignation since 1992."

The MP added: "In the eyes of fellow Conservative MPs, Willetts' greatest fault was getting caught. They have no real quarrel about

such behaviour - just embarrassment when exposed. Indeed ministers have now refused to rule out the possibility of Willetts working for Conservative Central Office as a political strategist in the election campaign. Willetts' tendency to "dissemble" would stand him in good stead at the Tory lie machine, although despite his bizarre "two brains" reputation, he doesn't appear to be very good at it."

For Immediate Release. No 393/96 Thurs 12 December 1996

MP CALLS FOR COMMONS STATEMENT ON E COLI OUTBREAK IN PENDLE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today called for a Commons statement on the E Coli outbreak which is gripping his Pendle constituency. Environmental health officers and doctors from the East Lancashire Health Authority are still trying to track down the source of the infection.

Speaking in the Commons earlier this afternoon, the Pendle MP called on the Leader of the House, Tony Newton, to arrange for a ministerial statement to be made on the outbreak which he said was causing terrible anxiety in the area.

The MP went on to press for an early debate on the wider issue of food safety.

Prentice said: "E Coli 0157 is the latest horror to hit us. We've had salmonella, listeria and goodness knows what else served up on the nation's plates. We need to find out what is causing this rash of food safety problems."

"The Government cannot wash its hands of this issue. Lapses in food safety - as shown by what has happened in Scotland - can have cataclysmic consequences."

For Immediate Release. No 394/96 Wed 18 December 1996

PENDLE JOBLESS FALLS TO LOWEST SINCE JOHN MAJOR BECAME PM IN NOVEMBER 1990

Today's unemployment figures for Pendle are the lowest since John Major became Prime Minister six years ago. 1,620 people were out of

work and claiming benefit in Pendle last month. This represents an unemployment rate of 4.5%. In November 1990 - when John Major entered Downing Street as PM - there were 1,708 people out of work in Pendle. Unemployment reached its peak in Pendle in August 1992 when 3,355 people were out of work.

Last month there were 1,297 (6%) men out of work and 323 (2.3%) women. There were 201 unfilled vacancies at the JobCentre in Colne and 318 at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "It was always a racing certainty that, before the General Election, the Government would get back to where they started from six years ago! What a commentary on Conservative economic policy."

The MP continued: "What Ministers will hail as a colossal success story will be discounted by people who prefer to rely on the evidence of their own eyes rather than Conservative fiddled figures. The Tories are so good at fiddling they could start their own orchestra."

"Nationally, the figures purport to show that unemployment has dropped below two million. The Government is asking ordinary families to be happy about the fact that two million people are out of a job - nearly double the number under the last Labour government."

more follows

PENDLE JOBLESS

"But it's a fiddle in any case. They've changed the way the figures are calculated so many times - over 30 in fact - that nobody believes them any more."

The MP added: "The reality is that:

- • one in five households has no-one working

* • 11 million people, more than one in four of the working population, have experienced unemployment since John Major became Prime Minister

* • job insecurity is rife: only half the workforce are in full-time secure employment. The other half are in part-time, temporary, insecure work or unemployed.

- • downward mobility is becoming the norm: today half of all the people who are unemployed were in their last job for less than a year. Worse, more than half the people currently finding jobs are likely to be out of work again within a year."

  "People in Pendle as elsewhere have had a belly full of Conservative lies and insecurity."

For Immediate Release. No 395/96 Tues 17 December 1996

MINISTER CALMS FEARS OVER E COLI OUTBREAK

The E Coli outbreak in Pendle seems to be under control although the source of the infection is still a mystery says the area's MP, Gordon Prentice.

Last week the MP pressed Government Ministers for an assurance that the full resources of the Department of Health would be put at the disposal of the local health authority.

Yesterday, Health Minister John Horam told the Pendle MP: "E coli infection has been isolated in clinical samples from 12 individuals, including one outside the area who has been linked to this outbreak. Of these, nine have been or are ill, but all are recovering."

The Minister added: "The outbreak is being investigated locally by a control team which comprises medical, scientific, and environmental health experts. Officials in the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are closely monitoring the progress of the local team and the action taken. Detailed epidemiological and microbiological investigations are continuing and precautionary measures have been taken to ensure that public health in the locally is not jeopardised."

Gordon Prentice commented: "The whole episode makes the case for a free standing Food Agency to stand guard over what we eat and drink. I have already pressed the Leader of the House for a wide ranging debate on food safety early in the New Year."

For Immediate Release. No 396/96 Tues 17 December 1996

MP RIDICULES MAJOR OVER LATEST U TURN

The Government deserves no praise for yesterday's dramatic U-turn on BSE, resuming the selective cull of up to 100,000 cattle to get the EU ban lifted, says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP - who is a member of the Commons Agriculture Select Committee - said: "Ever since the start of the latest BSE crisis in March, Labour along with the NFU have been calling for decisive action to save our beef industry. The Government's entire response has been spectacularly inept. Consumers and farmers alike have been disastrously let down. With every batty new statement from Hogg, the government's drift, lack of leadership, and negligence of British interests in Europe becomes more glaringly obvious."

Note to Editors: The chronology of the BSE Crisis:
20 March: Latest BSE crisis breaks. Douglas Hogg tells Commons. "I do not believe that this information should damage consumer confidence and thus the beef market."
Late March-April: Consumer confidence and beef sales collapse. EU imposes export ban on British beef products and demands Selective slaughter of cattle. Major declares "beef war" and policy of non-co-operation with Europe.
June: Government gives in at Florence summit and agrees to a cull. Presented by Major as a triumph, he predicts that selective cull will be carried out and ban lifted by November.
September: On the basis of "new" scientific evidence, Government backs out of the Florence agreement and refuses to re-start the selective slaughter programme.
October: As the self-imposed deadline for ending the EU ban approaches, Roger Freeman says government will comply with Florence agreement after all. Hogg denies this.
December: Government recognises what everyone has been telling them for months and gives in to the Florence agreement - again.

For Immediate Release. No 397/96 Tues 17 December 1996

COUNCIL WATCHDOG BACKS LABOUR'S PLANS

A new report today by the Audit Commission slams the Government's record on school choice - and offers support for key Labour measures to improve standards and efficiency says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Commenting on the report from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: "John Major said in March of this year that *every parent should be able to choose a good school for their child*. The reality revealed by today's report is that

• class sizes continue to rise in popular schools, and appeals by parents are on the increase - "the system risks gridlock"

• one in five parents do not get their genuine first choice school.

• there are insufficient mechanisms to turn around under performing schools quickly, potentially condemning children to years of poor education.

The MP added: "The report backs the Opposition's proposal for regular LEA education plans - which Labour would back up with the chance for local public inquiries - and for successful schools taking over neighbouring schools which are struggling, to help turn them around."

For Immediate Release. No 398/96 Tues 17 December 1996

EAST LANCS CAPITAL CHALLENGE BID GETS GO-AHEAD

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today welcomed the news that the East Lancashire Partnership SRB bid has been given the go-ahead.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The £9.3m bid is a good one. It will bring a co-ordinated approach to development in East Lancashire. It should become the nerve centre of the area - and a real force for change. It is splendid news."

Note to Editors: East Lancashire Partnership. A 6 year scheme which will bring together six local authorities to provide a co-ordinated approach to the development of East Lancashire. A dedicated secretariat will be established to co-ordinate activity across the partnership with core sub-groups on Economic Development. European Issues, Transport and Housing. An investment strategy will be developed and priorities for inward investment will be identified. Marketing and promotional events will be co-ordinated across the sub region.

Key Outputs: 2,300 jobs safeguarded/created. 140 businesses advised. 10 new business start-ups.

Costs: Year 1: £63,000 Total £727,000 Scheme Total: £9.3m

For Immediate Release. No 399/96 Tues 17 December 1996

TEACHERS IN PENSIONS LOBBY

Teachers in Pendle are up in arms about threatened changes to their pensions and retirement arrangements. At an NUT lobby of Westminster today, local MP met aggrieved teachers from around the country and from his own constituency.

The Government plans to alter the premature retirement regulations for teachers following a report from the Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, which argued that the cost of the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme was spiralling out of control. The Government has signalled its intention of switching the burden from central government to the teachers' employers.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "There is a big problem with teachers fleeing the profession after years of being ground down and denigrated by this Government. Premature retirement is almost seen as a blessed relief. In the last ten years 150,000 teachers have taken early retirement. Only one in six primary school teachers and one in nine secondary teachers stay in teaching to the set retirement age. This is very worrying."

The MP added: "We believe it is necessary to pre-empt the large number of early retirements in a positive way. Too many teachers have faced early burn out because of the undermining of their profession over the last 17 years. Labour has developed a set of measures to raise the status of teaching - including a General Teaching Council to promote and regulate the profession and a new grade of Advanced Skills Teacher to encourage experienced teachers to stay in the classroom as an alternative to management lines of promotion."

more follows

"We also promise to cut class sizes to no more than 30 for all five, six and seven year olds; address discipline problems and tackle disrepair of school buildings."

Shadow Education Secretary, David Blunkett, added: "We recognise that there will still be some for whom early retirement is the only viable option. We are aware that precipitate Government action could cause a flight of teachers from the profession before next April's deadline. Equally, given the difficulties faced in recruiting sufficient quality new teachers as demand rises, we must consider all the implications of the Government's proposals. We wish to have neither old teachers squeezed out for cheaper newly qualified teachers nor opportunities

denied for new entrants to the profession because senior older teachers who are ill are refused retirement."

For Immediate Release. No 400/96 Wed 18 December 1996

CHEATING ROW EXPLODES AT WESTMINSTER

Today's row over Monday's vote on the Common Fisheries Policy shows how desperate the Conservatives have become as they slide towards election defeat says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Labour withdrew co-operation from the pairing system for House of Commons votes last night after it became clear that the Government had cheated on Monday. In what "The Times" today calls "blatant deceit" by the Government, Tory whips paired three missing MPs twice, giving them an extra three votes."

The MP added: "Today they are lying again - claiming that Labour Chief Whip Donald Dewar had apologised for Labour's retaliation during the stalking bill last night. Donald Dewar has done no such thing and has no cause to do so. And the claim that Labour is jeopardising the stalking bill are a lie too. Labour will not do anything to impede the bill - backed by my East Lancashire colleague Janet Anderson - we are simply improving it."

"It's just the latest example of Tory lies, a week after the humiliating resignation of Minister David Willetts over his "dissembling." This government lies, cheats and bungles as it drifts from crisis to crisis."

"No amount of cheating will save this Government now."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP does not pair and has never done so.

For Immediate Release. No 401/96 Wed 18 December 1996

PENDLE MP WINS COMMONS DEBATE ON MS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has secured a Commons debate on the treatment of Multiple Sclerosis. The Speaker agreed to his request for an urgent debate and he will be raising the issue on 13 January 1997, the day the Commons returns after the Christmas recess.

The MP said: "More often than not, MS strikes young people - often in the prime of life. There are MS clusters all over the country and I fear that in West Craven we have more than our share of people with MS."

The MP added: "Astonishingly, treatment depends not simply on clinical need but on the lottery of where a person happens to live in the United Kingdom. Given that we are supposed to have a National Health Service I want to know what the Government is going to do about this scandalous state of affairs."

For Immediate Release. No 402/96 Thurs 19 December 1996

1996 A YEAR OF BLUNDER AND FOLLY SAYS MP

1996 has been historic for Labour - and disastrous for the Conservatives says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking from Westminster as Parliament went into recess for Christmas, the MP said: "The Conservatives have lied, bungled and drifted their way towards the election defeat which is now only months away. People in Pendle will be glad to see the back of them."

Note to Editors: A chronology of 1996

January: Thatcher accuses Major of betraying her policies, denounces one-nation Conservatism and ridicules pro-Europeans.
Ann Widdecombe forced to apologise over handcuffing of female prisoners.

February. The Scott report. Robin Cook savages Tories, Waldegrave found to have misled House on 12 different occasions; no-one resigns; Government survives by one vote.

March. BSE crisis breaks. ministers flounder as beef sales collapse.

April: Catastrophic defeat for Tories in Staffs SE by-election, Labour win on 22% swing.

May. Tories lose over 650 seats in second-worst ever local council election results. Auditor finds Dame Shirley Porter and leading Westminster council Tories guilty of orchestrating largest local government corruption scandal this century.

June: Major claims beef victory with Florence agreement (ban unchanged 6 months later)

July. David Heathcoat-Amory resigns in protest at Government's European policy.

August Six Tory members of the Home Affairs select committee vote against proposals from Labour members for a ban on handguns, to public outrage.

more follows

1996

September. Tory Euro war (again). Eurosceptical Zurich speech by Rifkind, Clarke calls policy on EMU "pathetic," provoking a fellow minister to call for his resignation. Government halts BSE selective cull, EU ban stays in place.

October: Labour Party conference shows we are ready to govern. Cash-for-questions scandal again. Neil Hamilton's libel suit against *Guardian* collapses. Tory Party conference fails to restore them in the Polls.
Queen's Speech flops. instant government U-turns on stalking, paedophiles, knives.

November. Tories humiliated by European court of Justice ruling in favour of Working Time Directive on 48 hour week and holiday time. Budget a political disaster, first leaked, then buried within days - no poll boost for Tories as Labour proves a typical family will still have paid f 2,120 in extra taxes.

December: War pensions scandal and further Tory Euro war.
David Willets forced to resign for his role in cash-for-questions affair
Tories lose majority with crushing Labour victory in Barnsley East. by-election.

For Immediate Release. No 403/96 Mon 23 December 1996

CHRISTMAS GIFT FOR ANIMALS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is right behind Labour's commitment to improving the welfare of animals. Speaking in his Pendle constituency earlier today, the MP said: "The Party has outlined its commitments in

a new leaflet 'New life for Animals'. It shows just how seriously we take the whole issue of animal welfare."

The MP added: "We have been calling for a ban on the testing cosmetics on animals, and an innovative proposal for Royal Commission to examine the whole argument for the justification of the use of animals in experiments, including an examination of what alternatives are available and how they could be introduced. Labour is the only party that has expressed opposition to live animal exports for slaughter. While the Tories have said they would not stop them even if they could, and the Liberal Democrats have referred to people opposed to this cruel trade as 'naive, counterproductive and hypocritical'. We believes this trade is bad for the welfare of animals and for the rural economy."

"We will promote meat exports, rather than a live export trade and will use the law to both tighten and enforce existing standards. We also have a long-term objective to see an end of intensive rearing systems like battery cages."

"At a time like Christmas when too many people still buy pets on impulse, we are proposing a national dog registration scheme to promote responsible ownership. We will also crack down on unscrupulous puppy farms. We are also the only party that has along standing pledge to allow parliamentary time for a free vote to end hunting with hounds."

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.....
613
For Immediate Release. No 53/97 Thurs 6 February 1997
.....
614
PRENTICE CALLS FOR REVIEW OF THE LAW ON DATA PROTECTION
.....
614
For Immediate Release. No 54/97 Tues 11 February 1997
.....
615
MINISTER ADOPTS "WAIT AND SEE" POLICY ON TRAFFIC GROWTH IN PENDLE
.....
615
For Immediate Release. No 55/97 Thurs 13 February 1997
.....
616
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE VISITING THE LEAR CORPORATION, SPRING GARDENS MILL, COLNE at 3.30pm on Friday 14 February
.....
616
For Immediate Release. No 56/97 Wed 12 February 1997
.....
617
LONE MOTHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE THE POOREST IN THE UK says PENDLE MP
.....
617
For Immediate Release. No 57/97 Tues 11 February 1997
.....
617
MP PLEDGES ACTION ON FUNDING CRISIS IN FE
.....
617
For Immediate Release. No 58/97 Mon 6 January 1997
.....
619
A LEVEL PLAN GETS POOR MARKS FROM MP
.....
619

For Immediate Release. No 59/97 Wed 12 February 1997
.....
620
PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN
.....
620
For Immediate Release. No 60/97 Tues 12 February 1997
.....
621
LABOUR GETS DEBATE ON CRISIS IN FE
.....
621
For Immediate Release. No 61/97. Thurs 13 February 1997
.....
621
LABOUR GOES FOR THE JUGULAR IN BSE DEBATE
.....
621
For Immediate Release. No 62/97 Mon 17 February 1997
.....
622
MP WRECKS "ONE DAY SALE"
.....
622
For Immediate Release. No 63/97 Tues 18 February 1997
.....
623
COST OF BSE 'INCALCULABLE' SAYS PRENTICE
.....
623
For Immediate Release. No 64/97 WED 19 February 1997
.....
624
MP ACCUSES MINISTER OF TURNING HIS BACK ON COLLEGE CRISIS
.....
624
Embargo 10am Tues 18 February 1997. No 65/97
.....
625
MP DUBS ONE DAY SALESMAN A "CHEAT"
.....
625
For Immediate Release. No 66/97 Tues 18 February 1997
.....
626

ELDERLY TO BENEFIT FROM THE FEEL-GOOD FACTOR
.....
626
For Immediate Release. No 67/97 Wed 19 February 1997
.....
626
MP SLAMS RAIL PRIVATISATION GRAVY TRAIN
.....
626
For Immediate Release. No 68/97 Wed 19 February 1997
.....
627
LEAR CORP TO STAY IN COLNE BUT SOME JOBS TO GO
.....
627
For Immediate Release. No 69/97 Mon 24 February 1997
.....
629
PRIVATISED UTILITIES HAVE GOT AWAY WITH "BLUE MURDER" SAYS PRENTICE
.....
629
For Immediate Release. No 70/97 Mon 24 February 1997
.....
630
MP SLAMS TORY RECORD ON SOCIAL SECURITY
.....
630
For Immediate Release. No 71/97 Mon 24 February 1997
.....
632
US POWER GIANT BIDS FOR YORKSHIRE ELECTRICITY
.....
632
For Immediate Release. No 72/97 Tues 25 February 1997
.....
632
THE TUBE WILL GO DOWN THE TUBE warns MP
.....
632
For Immediate Release. No 73/97 Tues 25 February 1997
.....
633
MP SLAMS NURSERY VOUCHER “WASTE”
.....
633

For Immediate Release. No 74/97 Wed 26 February 1997 634
MP CALLS FOR ANSWERS ON GULF WAR SYNDROME 634
For Immediate Release. No 75/97 Wed 26 February 1997 635
“JOB DESTROYING” SOCIAL CHAPTER IS A MYTH 635
For Immediate Release. No 76/97 Wed 26 February 1997 635
8,663 COUNCIL TAX PAYERS IN PENDLE PAY MORE THAN A MAYFAIR MILLIONAIRE says PRENTICE 635
For Immediate Release. No 77/97 Thurs 27 February 1997 636
PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP on Friday, 28 February. 636
For Immediate Release. No 78/97 Thurs 27 February 1997 636
“READ ALL ABOUT IT!” SAYS PRENTICE 636
For Immediate Release. No 79/97 Thurs 27 February 1997 637
THE GRAVY TRAIN IS STILL ROLLING SAYS MP 637
Embargoed 9am Fri 28 Feb No 80/97 Thurs 27 Feb 1997 638
MP CALLS FOR DEBATE ON THREATS TO BOOKSHOPS 638
For Immediate Release. No 81/97 Tues 4 March 1997 639

MP DISMISSES TORY POSTER CAMPAIGN
.....
639
For Immediate Release. No 82/97 Tues 4 March 1997
.....
639
PRENTICE GREETS WIRRAL VICTOR
.....
639
For Immediate Release. No 83/97 Wed 5 March 1997
.....
640
MP DERIDES “PENSIONS STUNT”
.....
640
For Immediate Release. No 84/97 Wed 5 March 1997
.....
641
TORY MP “AN ABSOLUTE DISGRACE” SAYS PRENTICE
.....
641
For Immediate Release. No 85/97 Thurs 6 March 1997
.....
641
21% OF FAMILIES IN PENDLE HAVE NO ONE IN WORK
.....
641
For Immediate Release. No 86/97 Thurs 6 March 1997
.....
642
PHOTOCALL: WELFARE RIGHTS IN PENDLE.
.....
642
For Immediate Release. No 87/97 Thurs 6 March 1997
.....
642
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT MARSDEN HOME RENOVATIONS, 120 RAILWAY STREET, NELSON at 1pm on Friday 7 March 1997.
.....
642
For Immediate Release. No 88/97 Thurs 6 March 1997
.....
643

MP SLAMS FOOD SAFETY COVER UP
.....
643
For Immediate Release. No 89/97 Thurs 13 March 1997
.....
643
MP HAILS BRIERFIELD “SIGN OF THE TIMES”
.....
643
For Immediate Release. No 90/97 Thurs 13 March 1997
.....
644
COMMONS COMMITTEE DAMNS NURSERY VOUCHERS
.....
644
For Immediate Release. No 91/97 Thurs 13 March 1997
.....
645
MP’s PLEA TO PRIME MINISTER OF AZAD KASHMIR - “DON’T FORGET PAUL WELLS”
.....
645
For Immediate Release. No 92/97 Wed 12 March 1997
.....
645
PRIMARY SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES “FLAWED”
.....
645
For Immediate Release. No 93/97 Thurs 13 March 1997
.....
646
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE KID’S CLUB, HOLDEN CENTRE, GISBURN ROAD, BARROWFORD at 4pm on FRIDAY 14 MARCH
.....
646
For Immediate Release. No 94/97 Tues 11 March 1997
.....
646
MP SAYS SEX HARASSMENT IN NAVY IS RIFE
.....
646
For Immediate Release. No 95/97 Friday 14 March 1997
.....
647

PENDLE MP TO OPEN NORTH WEST MS AGM
.....
647
For Immediate Release. No 96/97 Wed 12 March 1997
.....
647
MP PLEDGES ASSISTED PLACES SCHEME WILL GO
.....
647
For Immediate Release. No 97/97 Tues 11 March 1997
.....
649
BUSINESS LEADERS SLAM TORIES ON EUROPE
.....
649
For Immediate Release. No 98/97 Wed 12 March 1997
.....
650
MP CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO COME CLEAN ON SLAUGHTERHOUSES
.....
650
For Immediate Release. No 99/97 Wed 12 March 1997
.....
651
NO GAZUMPING IN PENDLE SAYS PRENTICE
.....
651
For Immediate Release. No 100/97 Wed 12 March 1997
.....
652
MP CONDEMNS PROPOSAL TO PRIVATISE SOCIAL SERVICES
.....
652
For Immediate Release. No 101/97 Thurs 13 March 1997
.....
652
NO CHANNEL 5 IN PENDLE
.....
652
For Immediate Release. No 102/97 Mon 17 March 1997
.....
654
MAJOR FIRES THE STARTING PISTOL
.....
654

For Immediate Release. No 103/97 Mon 17 March 1997
.....
654
VIOLENT CRIME UP
.....
654
For Immediate Release. No 104/97 Wed 19 March 1997
.....
655
PENDLE JOBLESS DOWN - BUT STILL HIGHER THAN WHEN JOHN MAJOR BECAME PM
.....
655
For Immediate Release. No 105/97 Mon 17 March 1997
.....
656
RADON CONSULTATION PAPER NOW OUT
.....
656
For Immediate Release. No 106/97 Tues 18 March 1997
.....
657
CRISIS LOOMS AS SCHOOLS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY GO INTO THE RED
.....
657
For Immediate Release. No 107/97 Tues 18 March 1997
.....
657
MP CALLS FOR A “LIVING COUNTRYSIDE”
.....
657
For Immediate Release. No 108/97 Wed 19 March 1997
.....
658
SLEAZE BACK ON THE AGENDA
.....
658
For Immediate Release. No 109/97 Wed 19 March 1997
.....
659
MP BACKS CALL FOR MORE ORGANIC FARMING
.....
659

For Immediate Release. No 110/97 Thurs 20 March 1997
.....
660
MP INSISTS SLEAZE REPORT MUST NOT BE BURIED
.....
660
For Immediate Release. No 111/97 Thurs 20 March 1997
.....
661
LABOUR MOVES INTO CYBERSPACE AT
http://www.labourwin97.org.uk.
.....
661
For Immediate Release. No 112/97 Thurs 20 March 1997
.....
661
FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF BSE CRISIS
.....
661
For Immediate Release. No 113/97 Friday 21 March 1997
.....
662
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE VISITING PENDLE COMMUNITY HOSPITAL, NELSON, TODAY FRIDAY 21 MARCH AT 10.15am.
.....
662
For Immediate Release. No 114/97 Friday 21 March 1997
.....
662
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE VISITING THE EAST LANCASHIRE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TODAY FRIDAY 21 MARCH AT 2pm.
.....
662
For Immediate Release. No 115/97 Mon 24 March 1997
.....
662
PENDLE FAMILIES FACE £46m DEBT INTEREST BILL
.....
663
For Immediate Release. No 116/97 Wed 2 April 1997
.....
663

LIB DEMS CAN'T WIN PENDLE SAYS TONY GREAVES
.....
663
For Immediate Release. No 117/97 Tues 25 March 1997
.....
664
PRENTICE PROMISES ACTION AGAINST ASSAULTS AT WORK IN PENDLE
.....
664
For Immediate Release. No 118/97 Tues 25 March 1997
.....
666
BYPASS INQUIRY WILL GO AHEAD
.....
666
For Immediate Release. No 119/97 Wed 2 April 1997
.....
668
PRENTICE CHALLENGES TORY CANDIDATE
.....
668
For Immediate Release. No 120/97 Wed 2 April 1997
.....
669
TORY MANIFESTO "DISHONEST" SAYS PRENTICE
.....
669
For Immediate Release. No 121/97 Wed 2 April 1997
.....
669
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE SERVING BEHIND THE COUNTER AT R. M. LEES, DISPENSING CHEMISTS, 6 MARKET STREET, NELSON at 3pm on FRIDAY 4 APRIL 1997
.....
669
For Immediate Release. No 123/97 Mon 7 April 1997
.....
670
TORY CANDIDATE SNUBS WEST CRAVEN
.....
670
For Immediate Release. No 124/97 Mon 7 April 1997
.....
670

“PHANTOM CANDIDATE” JIBE FROM PRENTICE
.....
670
For Immediate Release. No 125/97 Mon 7 April 1997
.....
671
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING BURNLEY AND PENDLE HOSPICE TODAY (Monday) AT 7.30pm
.....
671
For Immediate Release. No 125/97 Mon 7 April 1997
.....
671
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING TOWNHOUSE SCHOOL, TOWNHOUSE ROAD, NELSON at 11am on Wednesday, 9th April to see the young people make his campaign badges.
.....
671
For Immediate Release. No 127/97 Mon 7 April 1997
.....
671
CORRUPTION: HAMILTON MUST GO
.....
671
For Immediate Release. No 128/97 Mon 7 April 1997
.....
672
TORY PENSION PLAN UNRAVELS says PRENTICE
.....
672
For Immediate Release. No 129/97 Tues 8th April 1997
.....
673
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING WHEATLEY COURT, WHEATLEY CLOSE, FENCE at 11am today, Tuesday, 8 April.
.....
673
For Immediate Release. No 130/97 Tues 8th April 1997
.....
673
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISTING THE ST. JOSEPH'S PARISH CENTRE CLUB, BOLLANDER ST. (off Gisburn Rd.) BARNOLDSWICK ON THURSDAY 10 APRIL AT 12.30PM.
.....
673

For Immediate Release. No 131/97 Tues 8 April 1997
.....
673
PRENTICE WELCOMES REPORT FROM CHURCHES
.....
673
For Immediate Release. No 132/97 Tues 8 April 1997
.....
674
PRENTICE RIDICULES TORY PROMISES TO HELP SMALL BUSINESSES
.....
674
For Immediate Release. No 133/97 Wed 9 April 1997
.....
675
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING THE MARSDEN SOCIAL AND WORK DAY CENTRE, MANCHESTER ROAD, NELSON (on the edge of Nelson Town Centre) at 2pm today, Wednesday 9 April.
.....
675
For Immediate Release. No 134/97 Wed 9 April 1997
.....
676
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE SERVING BEHIND THE COUNTER AT PENNEY'S PHARMACY, 19, RAINHALL ROAD, BARNOLDSWICK ON FRIDAY 11 APRIL AT 11.00am
.....
676
For Immediate Release. No 135/97 Wed 9 April 1997
.....
676
PRENTICE VOWS "LABOUR WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE"
.....
676
For Immediate Release. No 136/97 Thurs 10 April 1997
.....
677
PRENTICE SINGS FOR HIS SUPPER AT ST JOSEPH'S
.....
677
For Immediate Release. No 137/97 Thurs 10 April 1997
.....
678

PRENTICE WARNS OF BOGUS “EUROPEAN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANTS”
.....
678
For Immediate Release. No 138/97 Mon 14 April 1997
.....
679
PRENTICE TARGETED BY PRO HUNTING GROUPS
.....
679
For Immediate Release. No 139/97 Mon 14 April 1997
.....
679
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING GIBFIELD SCHOOL, COLNE, TOMORROW, TUESDAY 15 APRIL AT 11AM
.....
679
For Immediate Release. No 140/97 Mon 14 April 1997
.....
680
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE OPENING THE LABOUR PARTY’S CAMPAIGN HQ at 17 Albert Road, Barnoldswick (Barlick Town Square - you can’t miss it!) tomorrow, Tuesday, 15 April, at 10.30am.
.....
680
For Immediate Release. No 141/97 Mon 14 April 1997
.....
680
PRENTICE WELCOMES NELSON ELECTION FORUM
.....
680
For Immediate Release. No 141/97 Mon 14 April 1997
.....
680
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING LONTEX, FERNBANK AVE, BARNOLDSWICK at 11.30am on Wednesday 16 April.
.....
680
For Immediate Release. No 142/97 Sun 13 April 1997
.....
681
PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Favordale Home for the Elderly, Byron Rd, Colne tomorrow, Monday 14 April 1997, at 10.30am.

.....
681
For Immediate Release. No 143/97 Tues 15 April 1997
.....
681
PRENTICE RIDICULES “THREE CARD TRICK”(not sent)
.....
681
For Immediate Release. No 144/97 Tues 15 April 1997
.....
682
PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Cleveland Guest Engineering at 9.30am on Thursday 17 April 1997.
.....
682
For Immediate Release. No 145/97 Tues 15 April 1997
.....
682
NHS DENTISTRY IN CRISIS SAYS PRENTICE
.....
682
For Immediate Release. No 145/97 Tues 15 April 1997
.....
682
NHS DENTISTRY IN CRISIS SAYS PRENTICE
.....
682
For Immediate Release. No 146/97 Tues 15 April 1997
.....
683
PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Albert Hartley, Crow Nest Mill, Barnoldswick at 2pm on Thursday 17 April 1997.
.....
683
For Immediate Release. No 147/97 Wed 16 April 1997
.....
683
PENDLE JOBLESS -BACK TO WHERE IT STARTED FROM
.....
683
For Immediate Release. No 148/97 Friday 18 April 1997
.....
684
TORY CANDIDATE WANTS REFERENDUM ON WHETHER UK SHOULD GET OUT OF EUROPE

.....
684
For Immediate Release. No 149/97 Saturday 19 April 1997
.....
685
SNEAKY THIEVES PINCH POSTERS
.....
685
For Immediate Release. No 150/97 Mon 21 April 1997
.....
685
PRENTICE WARNS AGAINST POST OFFICE SELL OFF
.....
685
For Immediate Release. No 151/97 Saturday 19 April 1997
.....
686
PRENTICE SAYS ELECTION IS ABOUT HOPE vs. FEAR
.....
686
For Immediate Release. No 152/97 Mon 21 April 1997
.....
687
PRENTICE OFFERS A DATE FOR BARLICK ELECTION HUSTINGS - WITH OR WITHOUT THE TORY
.....
687
For Immediate Release. No 153/97 Sunday 20 April 1997
.....
687
PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Euravia in Kelbrook at 2pm on Monday 21 April 1997.
.....
687
For Immediate Release. No 154/97 Sunday 20 April 1997
.....
688
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE SPEAKING TO THE LOCAL BRANCH OF THE NFU at the Alma Inn, Laneshawbridge at 8pm on Tuesday 22 April 1997.
.....
688
For Immediate Release. No 155/97 Mon 21 April 1997
.....
688

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE DISCUSSING PLANS FOR THE NEW LOWER PARK MARINA WITH TERRY HORAN, WATERWAY MANAGER FOR BRITISH WATERWAYS at 3.30pm on Wednesday 23 April at Lower Park Marina, Barnoldswick
.....
688
For Immediate Release. No 156/97 Mon 21 April 1997
.....
688
GRAMMAR SCHOOL MADNESS IN PENDLE
.....
688
For Immediate Release. No 157/97 Tuesday 22 April 1997
.....
689
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING THE PRECISION ENGINEERING FIRM, WESTONS, at STATION ROAD, FOULRIDGE at 11am on Wednesday 23 April.
.....
689
For Immediate Release. No 158/97 Tuesday 22 April 1997
.....
689
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING THE ECROYD TRAINING CENTRE, GIBFIELD ROAD, COLNE at 2pm on Wednesday 23 April 1997.
.....
689
For Immediate Release. No 159/97 Thurs 24 April 1997
.....
690
PRENTICE HAILS DECISION OF FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE NFU TO VOTE LABOUR
.....
690
For Immediate Release. No 160/97 Wed 23 April 1997
.....
691
PRENTICE PINS BLAME FOR BSE CATASTROPHE ON THE TORIES
.....
691
For Immediate Release. No 161/97 Thurs 24 April 1997
.....
692

SEVEN DAYS TO GO
.....
692
For Immediate Release. No 162/97 Friday 25 April 1997
.....
692
PHOTOCALL: PRENTICE TAKES TO THE ROAD
.....
693
For Immediate Release. No 163/97 Mon 28 April 1997
.....
693
PRENTICE TURNS HIS IRE ON TORY
.....
693
For Immediate Release. No 164/97 Friday 25 April 1997
.....
694
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE AT THE PENDLE SCHOOLS FESTIVAL, Colne Municipal Hall on Saturday 26th April at 7pm.
.....
694
For Immediate Release. No 165/97 Friday 25 April 1997
.....
694
PRENTICE TAKES THE BISCUIT
.....
694
For Immediate Release. No 166/97 Mon 28 April 1997
.....
694
PRENTICE SLAMS YOBS
.....
695
For Immediate Release. No 167/97 Tues 6 May 1997
.....
695
MP “STAGGERED” BY HUGE MARGIN OF VICTORY
.....
695
For Immediate Release. No 168/97 Wednesday 7 May 1997
.....
696
PRENTICE HAILS RE-ELECTION OF SPEAKER BETTY BOOTHROYD
.....
696

For Immediate Release. No 169/97 Tues 20 May 1997
.....
696
MP PLEDGES BILL TO OUTLAW ONE DAY SALES
.....
696
For Immediate Release. No 170/97 Tues 20 May 1997
.....
697
GOVERNMENT ORDERS REVIEW OF DENTAL COVER
.....
697
For Immediate Release. No 171/97 Wed 21 May 1997
.....
698
PRENTICE APPOINTED PPS TO TRANSPORT MINISTER
.....
698
For Immediate Release. No 172/97 Tues 20 May 1997
.....
698
HOWARD “DOES VERBAL GYMNASTICS” WITH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLAIMS PENDLE MP
.....
698
For Immediate Release. No 173/97 Wed 21 May 1997
.....
699
STAGECOACH SAVAGED BY MP
.....
699
For Immediate Release. No 174/97 Wed 21 May 1997
.....
700
PRENTICE HAILS LANDMINE BAN
.....
700
For Immediate Release. No 175/97 Thursday 22 May 1997
.....
700
PRENTICE WELCOMES EARLY MOVE ON NURSERY EDUCATION
.....
701
For Immediate Release. No 176/97 Tues 27 May 1997
.....
701

MP HOPES FOR PROGRESS ON KASHMIR TALKS
.....
701
For Immediate Release. No 177/97 Tues 27 May 1997
.....
702
NEW FIGURES SHOW EXTENT OF LOW PAY IN PENDLE
.....
702
For Immediate Release. No 178/97 Wed 28 May 1997703
PENDLE SCOOPS DUCHY CASH
.....
703
For Immediate Release. No 179/97 Thursday 29 May 1997
.....
705
MP BACKS MINISTER'S MOVE TO MEET GULF VETERANS
.....
705
For Immediate Release. No 180/97 Thursday 29 May 1997
.....
705
MP SLAMS CAMELOT PAY RISE
.....
705
For Immediate Release. No 181/97 Mon 2 June 1997
.....
706
MP TO VISIT AMBULANCE HQ
.....
706
For Immediate Release. No 182/97 Mon 2 June 1997
.....
707
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE WITCHES GALORE
SHOP IN NEWCHURCH AT 5PM ON FRIDAY, 6 JUNE 1997
.....
707
For Immediate Release. No 183/97 Mon 2 June 1997
.....
707
SACRED HEART RC CHURCH CENTENARY
.....
707

For Immediate Release. No 184/97 Tues 10 May 1997
.....
707
COLNE FOULRIDGE BYPASS INQUIRY SET FOR 5 AUGUST
.....
707
For Immediate Release. No 185/97 Tues 10 May 1997
.....
708
GOVERNMENT TO MOVE AHEAD ON ACCESS TO LAND
.....
708
For Immediate Release. No 186/97 Wed 4 June 1997
.....
709
PRENTICE WELCOMES END OF POLITICAL GONGS
.....
709
For Immediate Release. No 188/97 Thurs 5 June 1997
.....
709
PRENTICE BACKS KEY ROLE FOR FURTHER EDUCATION
.....
709
For Immediate Release. No 188/97 Tuesday 10 June 1997
.....
710
MP WELCOMES MOVE TO BRING IN TOTAL HANDGUN BAN
.....
710
For Immediate Release. No 189/97 Tuesday 10 June 1997
.....
711
COLNE/FOULRIDGE BYPASS PUBLIC INQUIRY TO BE DELAYED AS COUNTY BIDS FOR PFI MEGA SCHEME
.....
711
For Immediate Release. No 190/97 Wednesday 11 June 1997
.....
711
PRENTICE CALLS TIME ON TIMESHARE TOUTS
.....
711
For Immediate Release. No 191/97 Wednesday 11 June 1997
.....
712

MP WARNS OF DRUGS MENACE
.....
712
For Immediate Release. No 192/97 Wednesday 11 June 1997
.....
713
MP LISTS ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE NEW LABOUR GOVERNMENT
.....
713
For Immediate Release. No 193/97 Thursday 12 June 1997
.....
714
PENDLE JOBLESS FIGURES AT NEW LOW
.....
715
For Immediate Release. No 194/97 Friday 13 June 1997
.....
715
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE PENDLE HERITAGE CENTRE, TODAY, FRIDAY 13 JUNE at 11.30am.
.....
715
For Immediate Release. No 195/97 Monday 16 June 1997
.....
715
PRENTICE PLEDGES NHS CARE WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ALL, ACCORDING TO NEED AND FREE AT THE POINT OF USE
.....
715
For Immediate Release. No 196/97 Monday 16 June 1997
.....
716
MP BACKS BID TO BAN FOX HUNTING
.....
716
For Immediate Release. No 197/97 Tuesday 17 June 1997
.....
718
MP WELCOMES DECISION TO BASE HOUSING INVESTMENT ON NEED
.....
718
For Immediate Release. No 198/97 Monday 16 June 1997
.....
719

PRENTICE HAILS ROLLS ROYCE ENGINES ORDER
.....
719
For Immediate Release. No 199/97 Tuesday 17 June 1997
.....
720
MP WELCOMES MOVE TO ALLOW COUNCILS TO USE THEIR "CASH IN THE BANK"
.....
720
For Immediate Release. No 200/97 Thursday 19 June 1997
.....
720
GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS OVER CEMENT MANUFACTURE
.....
721
For Immediate Release. No 201/97 Thursday 19 June 1997
.....
722
MP SLAMS "GROTESQUE" SET ASIDE
.....
722
For Immediate Release. No 202/97 Friday 20 June 1997
.....
723
PRENTICE BACKS BEER BILL
.....
723
For Immediate Release. No 203/97 Friday 20 June 1997
.....
724
PLANNING CONTROLS OVER GARDEN EXTENSIONS SET TO STAY
.....
724
For Immediate Release. No 204/97 Friday 20 June 1997
.....
725
GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES ROADS REVIEW
.....
725
For Immediate Release. No 205/97 Friday 19 June 1997
.....
727

GOVERNMENT SAYS COUNCILS CAN SPEND THEIR OWN CASH! .....
727
For Immediate Release. No 206/97 Tuesday 24 June 1997 .....
730
INDEPENDENT FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY "NOW ON THE HORIZON" SAYS PENDLE MP .....
730
For Immediate Release. No 207/97 Thursday 26 June 1997 .....
730
PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP .....
731
For Immediate Release. No 208/97 Thursday 26 June 1997 .....
731
PENDLE MP WELCOMES BUS REVIEW .....
731
For Immediate Release. No 209/97 Monday 23 June 1997 .....
732
PENDLE MP TAKES HIS BONES FOR A WALK .....
733
For Immediate Release. No 210/97 Monday 23 June 1997 .....
733
PRENTICE BACKS BID BY EDGE END TO CREATE A NEW EAST LANCASHIRE CRICKET COACHING CENTRE .....
733
For Immediate Release. No 211/97 Monday 23 June 1997 .....
734
PRENTICE REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO CREATE STRATEGIC RAIL AUTHORITY .....
734
For Immediate Release. No 212/97 Monday 23 June 1997 .....
735

PRENTICE "APPALLED" BY RESUMPTION IN IVORY TRADE
.....
735
For Immediate Release. No 213/97 Monday 23 June 1997
.....
735
GOVERNMENT STOPS HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES
.....
735
For Immediate Release. No 214/97 Monday 23 June 1997
.....
736
MP STEPS INTO TRAWDEN CONTROVERSY
.....
736
For Immediate Release. No 215/97 Wednesday 25 June 1997
.....
737
MP PLEDGES TO ROOT OUT PRESCRIPTION FRAUD
.....
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MP WANTS VIEWS ON ROADS STRATEGY
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772
YOUNG PEOPLE GIVE MP A HELPING HAND
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For Immediate Release. No 250/97 Tuesday 12 August 1997
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773
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE OPENING OF THE PAKISTAN ARTS AND CRAFTS EXHIBITION, today, Tuesday, 12 August, at 7pm at the Civic Theatre, Stanley Street, Nelson.
.....
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MP BACKS PLANS TO REFORM COMPETITION LAW
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OPEN UP THE QUANGOES TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY SAYS PENDLE MP775
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MP VOICES CONCERNS ABOUT TRANSPORT OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS BY AIR

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MP ALARMED OVER CLOSURE THREAT TO BARLICK'S BENEFITS AGENCY OFFICE
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PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP will be attending the following local events over this weekend
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UK AND PAKISTAN ARE "OLD FRIENDS AND MODERN PARTNERS" SAYS PENDLE MP
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PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT WALTER STREET COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL BRIERFIELD
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PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT COUNTRY HOLIDAYS TODAY (Wednesday) at 2pm.
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MP SAYS DIANA'S DEATH "A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY"
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REGIONAL GOVERNMENT CHIEF VISITS PENDLE
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EDUCATION/NURSERY EDUCATION
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For Immediate Release. No 264/97 Monday 8 September 1997783
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For Immediate Release. No 265/97 Monday 8 September 1997
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784
MP DRIVES HOME THE TRANSPORT MESSAGE
.....
784
For Immediate Release. No 266/97 Monday 8 September 1997
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PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP will officially open the newly refurbished Earby youth hostel on Saturday 13th September 1997 at 2pm
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785
For Immediate Release. No 267/97 Monday 8 September 1997
.....
785
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP ANDMICHAEL MEACHER MP to scale Boulsworth Hill on Friday 12th September 1997 at 1pm (meeting at 12 noon)
.....
785
For Immediate Release. No 268/97 Thursday 11 September 1997
.....
786
DENTAL INEQUALITIES TO BE CUT WITH £9 MILLION BOOST TO NHS DENTAL SERVICES

.....
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PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP
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For Immediate Release. No 270/97 Monday 15 September 1997
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ROLLS ROYCE GIVES EDGE END £5,000 TOWARDS CENTRE FOR CRICKET EXCELLENCE
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MP IN TALKS WITH BRITISH AEROSPACE
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SMALL RISE IN PENDLE JOBLESS
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MP TUNES IN
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GOVERNMENT TO CONSULT ON BULL BARS
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For Immediate Release. No 276/97 Monday 6 October1997
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MP BACKS MOVE TO GIVE MOBILE PHONE USERS A FAIR DEAL
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For Immediate Release. No 277/97 Monday 6 October 1997
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795
PHOTOCALL: JOHN BATTLE MP
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.....
795
ORDER! ORDER!
.....
795
For Immediate Release. No 279/97 Tuesday 7 October 1997
.....
796
PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP IS VISITING THE LANCASHIRE PROBATION SERVICE, Every Street, Nelson at 1.30pm on Tuesday 7th October.
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For Immediate Release. No 280/97 Wednesday 8 October 1997
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796
MPs TELL HEALTH UNION:
.....
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MP SAYS ITS TOO HOT FOR COMFORT
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PENDLE MP WELCOMES EXTRA £100 MILLION FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS
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MP URGES PENSIONERS TO TAKE UP BENEFITS
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OVER £2 BILLION IN UNCLAIMED BENEFITS (NOT SENT)
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PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP will be speaking on rural development issues at the Pendle Heritage Centre at on Thursday 16 October
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For Immediate Release. No 288/97 Wednesday 15 October 1997
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MISSED THE BUS? THE MP WANTS TO KNOW!
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For Immediate Release. No 289/97 Wed 15 October 1997
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PENDLE JOBLESS FALLS
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For Immediate Release. No 290/97 Tuesday 1 August 1997
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808
FIREWORKS RICHARD
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NHS FUNDING - RICHARD
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MP CALLS FOR NEW CONTROLS ON LASER PENS
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MP WANTS PROPERTY SALE PRICES MADE PUBLIC
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MP BACKS CALL TO CURB WIND FARMS
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ROAD TAX CHEATS TO BE CLAMPED IN NEW DRIVE AGAINST UNLICENSED VEHICLES
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NEW SECURITY MEASURES IN PLACE AT BARLICK'S BENEFITS AGENCY OFFICE
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RESIGNATIONS OVER EUROPE COULD SPLIT TORY PARTY SAYS PRENTICE
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PENDLE'S YOUNG PEOPLE GET A VOICE AT WESTMINSTER
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For Immediate Release. No 300/97 Thursday 9 October 1997815
DEFENCE (RICHARD)
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PUTTING EAST LANCS ON THE MAP
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REMEMBRANCE DAY
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PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE TO VISIT PENDLE
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For Immediate Release. No 304/97 Wednesday 5 November 1997
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HOUSING MINISTER TO VISIT PENDLE
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SHOCKING STATISTICS
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EAST LANCS HOUSING SUMMIT
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MP WELCOMES NEW MEASURES TO OPEN UP QUANGOS
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ROLLS ROYCE GETS £200m FROM GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP IMPROVED TRENT JET ENGINE
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NEW BOOST TO SECURE UK AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION
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PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP will be at Coates Lane County Primary, Kirkstall Drive, Barnoldswick at 6.30pm on Friday 5 December
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For Immediate Release. No 343/97 Monday 8 December 1997
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MP WELCOMES LANDMARK JUDGEMENTS ON LANDLORD AND FITTER IN GAS POISONING CASE
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MP MAKES BID FOR GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR NEW LONGHAUL AIRBUS
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NEW GUIDANCE SOON ON RADON RISK
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867
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LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS GET ANOTHER £1.5m TO BOOST LITERACY
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PA 5 Jun 97 18:07 BST S5518
.....
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PRESCOTT SIGNALS GREEN TAXES
.....
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For Immediate Release. No 01/97 Mon 6 January 1997

HOUSE BUILDING FOR RENT IS THE LOWEST SINCE WORLD WAR II SAYS PENDLE MP

"People here in the North West need help with getting homes or looking after their homes, but the Government won't do anything. Instead, we have the lowest number of houses being built for rent than at any time since the Second World War" says local MP Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency this week, the MP said: "Last year there was not a single council house being built in the North West region. That compares with a total of 8,649 in 1979, when Labour was last in office. The number of homeless people in the region has gone up from 7,130 in 1979 to 17,460 in 1995."

"But the Government isn't doing anything to help. In fact in the Budget last month, they actually did a lot to make things worse. They cut £1 billion from investment in building new homes for rent. They cut the amount councils can use to carry out repairs and improvements for their tenants. And they cut £130 million from Housing Benefit to tenants in the private sector."

"One of the results is that next year there will fewer new homes being built for rent than at any time since the Second World War. Enough is enough. Labour will start building new homes in the North West using some of the takings from the sale of council houses."

Note to Editors: The average number of new homes for rent started in each of the last five years is just 28,000. This compares with an average of over 120,000 per year under the last Labour Government.

Far from addressing this situation, the Tories' 1996 Budget will make the situation worse.

HOUSE BUILDING FOR RENT IS THE LOWEST SINCE WORLD WAR II SAYS PENDLE MP

In the 1996 Budget, the Government:

• cut £1 billion from spending on social housing, compared with the amount being spent this year

• cut the Housing Corporation's budget by £344 million
• cut the amount of money available to local councils for housebuilding and repairs by £290 million
• cut £130 million from Housing Benefit to tenants in the private sector

The result of the Budget will be: the worst record on building homes for rent since the Second World War; increasing homelessness; thousands of local authority tenants trapped in sub-standard accommodation; longer housing waiting lists

This is on top of the Government's already disastrous housing record

• last year, fewer homes for rent were built than in any year since World War II
• homelessness has already doubled under the Tories since 1979
• over 1 million families have suffered negative equity over the past five years
• 325,000 homes have been repossessed over the past five years
• the Tories have cut Mortgage Tax relief twice since the General Election despite promises at the General Election to maintain Mortgage Tax relief

For Immediate Release. No 02/97 Mon 6 January 1997

MP BLASTS COUNCIL TAX "FIDDLE" THAT COSTS PENDLE A FORTUNE

"The Government is pouring money into Conservative run Westminster Council at the expense of people all over the country, - including people here in Pendle" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: "New figures published on the local government grant announcement show that if Pendle Council got as much grant per head this year as Westminster, Pendle Council wouldn't have to collect any Council Tax at all! They would be able to pay out a rebate of £542 to every single Council Tax payer in Pendle."

"That's so Tory Westminster can keep down their Council Tax. And one of the reasons Westminster needs the cash to bail it out is because it's one of the least efficient councils in the country. Just compare Pendle Council with Westminster Council. Westminster spends £55 per head dealing with refuse. Pendle Council spends just £10.14 per head. Westminster spends £36.42

per head on cleaning the streets. Pendle Council spends £5.19. Westminster spends £214 per claimant on the paperwork for Council Tax and Housing benefits. Pendle Council spends £53.48. What a state of affairs."

The MP added: "I was very sorry to hear that my local Council - run as it is by the Liberal Democrats - chose not to press the Government to re-think. Labour councillors quite rightly wanted a face to face meeting with the Minister responsible but the Council has accepted the grant settlement with little more than a whimper. It's a very poor show indeed."

Note to Editors: The Government is continuing to run the local government grant system as a party political racket designed to bail out their friends in Tory Westminster Council. This was confirmed by figures

COUNCIL TAX "FIDDLE"

published on the local government grant settlement.

If every council in England got the same amount of Government grant per head as Tory Westminster:

• 334 out of 356 councils - 94 per cent wouldn't have to levy any Council Tax at all, they could pay out rebates to every Council Tax payer.

• 4 councils - Forest Heath, Tamworth, Newcastle Under Lyme and Rushmoor - could pay out rebates of over £900

• 323 councils could pay out rebates of over £200

This funding fiddle rests on the Tories' rigging of the system which assesses each council's needs. According to the Tories' system, Westminster is the 4th most deprived place in Britain, whereas for example Barnsley, after 18 pit closures, is deemed to be the 326th most deprived place in Britain. Part of the reason why Tory Westminster gets so much money from the Tories is to bail out its own inefficiencies.

Official figures published in March 1996 by the Audit Commission show that many of the services provided by Tory Westminster Council are by far the most expensive in Britain:

• Westminster Council spends £55 per head on refuse collection and disposal. This is the most expensive refuse collection and

disposal service in the country.

• Westminster spends £36.42 per head on street cleaning. This is the most expensive street cleaning service in the country.

• Westminster City Council spends £214 per claimant on benefits administration. This is the most expensive benefits administration in the country.

For Immediate Release. No 03/97 Mon 6 January 1997

TORY ELECTION POSTERS HIT PENDLE

The General Election campaign has arrived in Pendle with the appearance of a giant Conservative poster opposite the Town Hall in Nelson warning of **NEW LABOUR NEW TAXES**.

The area's Labour MP is taking it all in his stride. Speaking earlier today from his constituency office - a few hundred yards away in Carr Road - the MP said: "The Conservatives have more money than sense. After all the tax increases we've had from this Government since 1992 you would have to come from interplanetary space to believe this load of cods wallop. But the serious question is who is paying for this £10m poster campaign?"

The MP continued: "If a new Labour Government is returned at the General Election we shall be changing the law to bring transparency to the financing of political parties. This poster in Nelson is probably underwritten by some anonymous Hong Kong billionaire."

"Last August **"New Labour New Danger"** posters appeared all over East Lancashire. Before that, we had the ludicrous **"It hurt but it worked".** In 1992 it was **"Labour's Tax Bombshell."** The Conservative strategy is to frighten the voters out of their wits and they have millions of pounds to spend on their mendacious campaigns. What they say is a matter for them but how they get their millions is a matter for all of us."

The MP added: "The really worrying questions about Tory funds arise not from what we know, but over what we do not know. Labour declares the source of any donation over £5,000 and the

more follows

TORY ELECTION POSTERS HIT PENDLE

Party refuses any donation from a foreign source not eligible to vote in a British election."

The MP concluded: “The British people should know who is bankrolling the Conservative Party. There can be no valid objection to the principle behind any of our reforms.”

POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

The Labour Party proposes four key reforms:

• Every political party must declare the source of all donations over £5,000.

• No company shall make a political donation without first balloting shareholders to set up a political fund.

• Any shareholder must have the right to opt out of their share of a political fund.

• No political party shall accept donations from foreign sources.

For Immediate Release. No 04/97 Tues 7 January 1997

DEATHS FROM FOOD POISONING SOAR

The number of deaths from food poisoning has soared massively in the 1990s according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the Government's drive to deregulate the food industry must take part of the blame. Health Minister, John Horam, told the MP in a Commons written answer that the number of deaths from food poisoning has more than doubled from 94 in 1990 to 203 in 1995.

Last month in the Commons, the MP called for a Ministerial Statement on the E Coli outbreak in his Pendle constituency. The MP said: "Here we are, three weeks later, and we are still in the dark about the cause of the outbreak in Pendle. What is not in doubt is that the number of life threatening E Coli outbreaks has shot up alarmingly from two cases in 1990 to ten last year."

The MP, who sits on the Commons Agriculture Select Committee, said: "Food safety is a hot potato for this Government. We have

seen all sorts of dreadful things unleashed on an unsuspecting public, capped by BSE."

"It is as plain as a pikestaff that we need an independent Food Standards Agency - totally separate from the Ministry of Agriculture. People have absolutely no confidence in the present set up" said the MP.

Note to Editors: Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many people have died from food poisoning in each year since 1990; and, in each case, what was the source of the infection.

MR HORAM: Information on the number of people who have died from food poisoning is provided in the following table:

more follows

DEATHS FROM FOOD POISONING SOAR

DEATHS FROM FOOD POISONING FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

YEAR	NUMBER OF OUTBREAKS
1990	94
1991	82
1992	118
1993	109
1994	154
1995	203

SOURCE: Office for National Statistics - analysis of causes of death on death certificates. Notes: The data for 1990-92 represent registrations during the year. The data for 1993 onwards represent occurrences during the year. The introduction of a national case definition for food poisoning in 1992 may also have had the effect of increasing the range of infectious intestinal disease reported as food poisoning. Information on the source of the infection for each case is not available.

E. COLI 0157 OUTBREAKS IN ENGLAND & WALES

YEAR	NUMBER OF OUTBREAKS
1990	2

Press Releases: Complete set

1991	5
1992	5
1993	8
1994	5
1995 *	11
1996 *	10

SOURCE: Public Health Laboratory Service. * Provisional

For Immediate Release. No 05/97 Thurs 9 January 1997

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR A NATIONAL STRATEGY ON MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

People with Multiple Sclerosis are being neglected by the Government says local MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims the availability of effective treatment for the disabling condition depends on the lottery of where a person lives in the UK.

The MP is taking the issue to Westminster and next Monday (13 January) he has secured a special adjournment debate on the issue which he hopes will throw a spotlight on the problems facing those with MS.

Speaking in Nelson earlier today, The MP said: "MS affects about 1 in every 1,000 and, tragically, in seems to hit the young and those in the prime of life. I want people with MS in Pendle - and nationwide - to get a fair deal and not raw deal from this Government."

Note to Editors: One in every two people knows someone who has multiple sclerosis. There are over 80,000 people with MS in the UK and a further 2,500 are diagnosed with MS each year. MS is a disease of the central nervous system (CNS) characterised by a gradual deterioration of neurological function that can lead to permanent disability. In MS the disease process causes damage to the nerves in the brain and spinal cord. Most of the major nerves in the body are surrounded by a sheath of *myelin,* a fatty substance which acts as an electrical insulator facilitating the efficient transmission of nervous impulses between the brain and spinal cord and the nerves, which in turn control the muscles of the body. In MS, there is damage to the myelin sheath in the CNS leading to impaired conduction of messages from the brain and spinal cord to the muscles.

For Immediate Release. No 06/97 Tues 7 January 1997

CHILDREN IN JOBLESS HOUSEHOLDS

About 4,500 children in Pendle saw in the New Year in a household with nobody in work and the number has increased by about 600 since the General Election in 1992.

Speaking in Nelson earlier today, local MP Gordon Prentice described the shock figures as "a terrible indictment" of failed Government policies. The increase of 600 children locally has come almost entirely in jobless households with lone parents who number double those with two parents. The MP said: 'More and more lone parents are finding themselves trapped with their children in homes without work. They are often excluded from the official unemployment register because they cannot find jobs which allow their children to be cared for."

"Across Britain some 3 million children are in jobless households according to figures provided by the independent House of Commons Library. The local figures have been estimated from this by Mr Prentice. 'The fact that the number of both children in jobless families and jobless parents has jumped so steeply in Pendle since 1992 demonstrates how bogus the Government's figures are. Job insecurity is rife."

"Labour believes all jobless parents need a hand-up, not a hand-out. We want to see a national child-care strategy for pre-school and school-age children to enable parents to match the hours they work with the child care responsibilities they have. We also need a more flexible benefit system to provide a bridge rather than a barrier to work. And we need improved skills and training opportunities, especially for lone parents" said Mr Prentice.

For Immediate Release. No 07/97 Wed 8 January 1997

JOB LOSSES SEND PENDLE REELING

Major job losses at Prestige in Burnley and at Smith+Nephew in Brierfield have cast a dreadful pall over the New Year says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking in Nelson earlier today he said he was shocked at the scale of the job losses.

The MP said: “Prestige is a brand name known the world over and it is an absolute tragedy that this is happening. I shall be working with my colleague Peter Pike to see what, if anything, can be

done. Many of the people hit by the redundancies are my constituents."

"So far as Smith+Nephew is concerned, it has, I'm afraid, been one thing after another. I was in touch with the Managing Director earlier today to express my concern and he assured me that, despite the job losses, Brierfield was a site the company intended "to grow" over the next few years in the wake of all the restructuring."

The MP added: "This will come as cold comfort to the people who have been forced into redundancy."

Note to Editors: 50 people have accepted voluntary redundancy at the Brierfield site with approximately another 25 facing compulsory redundancy. At present the company employs 750 people at Brierfield.

For Immediate Release. No 08/97 Wed 8 January 1997

HORSFIELD RESIDENTS IN BIG CHILL

Shivering council tenants in Colne's Horsfield ward must be wondering what happened to the hundreds of thousands of pounds which swelled the coffers of Pendle Council when it sold its stake in the local bus company to Stagecoach last year.

In Pendle there are 225 homes rented from the council which do not have central heating and no fewer than 136 are in Horsfield. Local Labour councillor Sarah Hill is up in arms about the situation saying that in many of the houses there is only one gas fire flickering in a corner.

With another icy Arctic blast scything its way through the area, local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I pressed the Council ages ago for information on how it intended to spend the money it received from last year's controversial sale of Burnley and Pendle buses. I was told it would be used in support of the council's capital programme but that kind of vagueness is simply not good enough."

"I want to know, clearly and precisely, where the bus money is to be spent. For months the whole issue has been shrouded in the most absurd secrecy. The people in Horsfield have been told by my Liberal controlled council there is no money for central

heating. Not so. The money is there and we should know what the Council's priorities are when it comes to spending it."

For Immediate Release. No 09/97 Thurs 9 January 1997

PRIVATISED WATER INDUSTRY - STILL A TAX FREE ZONE SAYS PENDLE MP

North West Water made £1,741,900,000 profit and paid out £623,100,000 in dividends to shareholders since privatisation. Yet the company has been a "tax-free zone" says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. (Note: the comparable figures for Yorkshire Water are set out below in the notes to editors. Pendle is served by both.)

The MP said: "According to the published figures, North West Water has paid NO mainstream Corporation Tax since privatisation on the water and sewage part of their businesses. That's because when they privatised the industry, Ministers gave North West Water £1,159,840,000 million in special tax allowances. On top of that, they were given a £1,055,000,000 debt write-off and a £330,000,000 green dowry.

"People in Pendle know that North West Water and Yorkshire Water are rolling in profits. But most people don't know they have also been a tax-free zone. Most people here in Pendle have been forced to pay the 22 new taxes introduced since the last General Election. Now they face council tax increases forced through by the Government."

"It is quite wrong for the Government to help water remain a tax-free zone".

Note to Editors: The figures for Yorkshire Water are as follows: (they are set out in the same sequence as used above): Total profits since privatisation: £934,400,000. Total dividends paid to shareholders since privatisation: £300,500,000. Pre-privatisation investment eligible for tax allowances: £847,777,000. Debt write-off at privatisation: £559,000,000. Green dowry at privatisation: £89,000,000.

PRIVATISED WATER INDUSTRY - STILL A TAX FREE ZONE SAYS PENDLE MP

Newly-published figures show that for the six years since privatisation, the ten privatised water companies have paid virtually no mainstream Corporation Tax on their core water and sewage businesses. In some cases,
far from paying tax, the water and sewage company's capital allowances have been used to further offset the tax liability of the parent company. As a result, the industry remains virtually a tax-free zone.

Eight of the ten privatised water companies have paid no mainstream Corporation Tax at all on their core water and sewerage business. Three of these companies - Severn Trent, Southern Water and Welsh Water - actually show a negative amount of Corporation Tax paid, meaning that the tax allowances on the core water and sewerage business has actually been used to further offset the overall tax liability of the parent company.

The two companies who have paid Corporation Tax since privatisation are Northumbrian Water and South West Water, with payments totalling only £16 million. However the companies do not tell OFWAT how much of this amount is Advance Corporation Tax, which can be offset against future tax liabilities.

How Have They Avoided Paying Tax?

The companies have been able to get away with this because when the Tories privatised the water industry they gave the industry a staggering £7.7 billion worth of special tax allowances on the capital investment when the industry was publicly owned to set against future Corporation Tax liabilities. This was on top of £5 billion worth of debt write-offs and a £1.5 billion 'green dowry'.

Scandalous Profits of the Privatised Utilities

So it's not surprising that the water companies are rolling in profits and are up to their necks in take-overs and share buy-backs.

These levels of profits and dividends prove that the water companies can easily afford a windfall tax. That is why they will not be allowed to worm their way out of paying their fair share of Labour's windfall tax to help provide jobs and training for young people who have neither.

For Immediate Release. No 10/97. Thurs 9 January 1997

FAMILIES NEED DECENT HOMES says PENDLE MP

“A decent home is vital for family life, but John Major's Government has left hundreds of thousands of families without a decent place of their own” says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: "John Major really has a cheek to pretend his Government gives a high priority to family life. Somewhere decent to live is vital for family life. Yet under his Government, hundreds of thousands of families have nowhere decent to live. Pendle has some of the oldest and most run down housing in the entire country.”

“117,000 families are officially homeless with 44,000 forced to live in temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, and that destroys family life. 320,000 families have had their homes repossessed under John Major's Government. A further one-and-a-half million families are living in squalid, sub-standard conditions.”

"So much of a record for John Major who claims to be the friend of the family".

For Immediate Release. No 11/97 Mon 13 January 1997

"HEALTH CHOAS" CLAIM BY PENDLE MP

Labour is demanding a Commons statement on the crisis in the health service, following a mounting catalogue of near disasters and predictions of chaos this winter. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to put health at the top of the agenda.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Figures released today reveal that nearly one in four hospital beds has been lost since the Government's introduction of the internal market. Some types of beds in some areas have been hit even harder. Here in the North West we have lost over 40 per cent of our geriatric beds."

The MP added: "BMA Chairman Sandy Macara warned today that the NHS is chronically underfunded and that *"competition has become the enemy of effectiveness"* in the internal market. And new figures show that blood stocks have plunged to dangerously

low levels, and operations across the country may have to be cancelled."

"There are some in the Conservative Party who want to commercialise the NHS further, forcing more and more people to go private. This is the logical end result of 17 years of dismantling the health service, and especially of forthcoming primary care legislation."

"We need to rebuild and renew the NHS. Labour is pledged to cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step, by using £100 million from NHS red tape, and as part of this commitment we will end waiting for cancer surgery altogether."

For Immediate Release. No 12/97 Tues 14 January 1997

"DIRTY TRICKS" SCUPPER MS DEBATE

A move by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, to debate vital issues affecting people who suffer from Multiple Sclerosis last night fell victim to Government "dirty tricks".

The MP says his opportunity to put the Government's record on MS under the spotlight and to quiz Health Minister, Simon Burns, was sabotaged by Government Whips.

The MP, still furious following last night's debacle, said: "Last night the Commons was debating one of the centrepieces of the Government's legislative programme for this session - the Crime (Sentences) Bill. It was due to complete all its Commons stages last night with the report stage and third reading. Wholly unexpectedly, the Government whips pulled the plug on their own business at 10 o'clock. Now the Government will have to find additional time to bring the Bill back to the floor of the House." The MP's adjournment debate had been due to come on last night after the Crime (Sentences) Bill.

"This is the Government cutting off its nose to spite its face. They are simply saying - in a very juvenile way - that they can still control the Parliamentary timetable - even if it means losing valuable Parliamentary time for their own legislation - not ours! I feel very angry about what happened. My debate on MS is the collateral damage of Government wrecking tactics."

The MP added: "This morning I asked the Speaker to give me another early opportunity to raise MS and its treatment. Given all the shenanigans last night, I am keeping my fingers crossed."

For Immediate Release. No 13/97 Tues 14 January 1997

MP PRESSES MINISTERS ON "CRISIS IN AIREDALE"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is asking Ministers to comment on startling claims by Airedale consultant gynaecologist Peter Brunskill in the Craven Herald newspaper that family doctors "who had spent their budget were still sending him patients whose operations were then cancelled because the practice had no money to pay for services."

The MP commented: "Airedale is outside Pendle but takes many of my constituents - particularly from West Craven. If the claims are true - and I have no reason to disbelieve them - it is a shocking state of affairs. I have written to the Chief Executive of Airedale and I am in touch with Ministers to see what they have to say."

The MP continued: "The Government has created a health crisis this winter. The root cause of the problem is this crazy market system, which wastes money by creating massive extra bureaucracy. We will get rid of the Tories' internal market."

Note to Editors: • New figures show that the number of people waiting more than 12 months for operations has risen for the first time in three years. • Figures released earlier this week show that nearly one in four hospital beds have been lost since the introduction of the Tories' internal market - and now people are dying as a result. A 69 year-old London woman died after having a heart bypass operation cancelled four times between 13 December and 3 January because of the lack of intensive care beds. And a 60 year-old Leeds woman died after she collapsed in the snow outside a hospital but had to be driven 60 miles to another hospital as there were no beds. • A new report highlights the crisis in nursing, as fewer and fewer join a profession demoralised by Tory attacks on the NHS. The report shows that as fewer people train in the profession, the average age of nurses is rising. less than one in five is now under 30, and more than one in five are over 50.

For Immediate Release. No 14/97 Tues 14 January 1997

HOMEWORK VITAL SAYS MP

The Government is desperately trying to regain the initiative on education after Tony Blair's bold statement on school standards and homework at the weekend says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "As usual, with their new noises about homework the Tories' response is to try to steal Labour's ideas. My colleague, Shadow Education Minister, David Blunkett, has been emphasising the importance of national guidelines on homework since 1995. We have proposed guidelines to require primary school children to do a minimum of 30 minutes homework a night, and secondary school children at least 90 minutes."

The MP added: "And Labour is pledged to cut class sizes to 30 or under for five, six and seven year olds by using money saved from the assisted places scheme."

"If there is a change of Government - and the signs are there will be - we will see rapid action to provide nursery places in areas such as West Craven and elsewhere in Pendle where they are desperately needed."

For Immediate Release. No 15/97. Wed 15 January 1997

MP GIVES SAFETY WARNING

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has issued a blunt warning of the threat to business prosperity and workers' health in Pendle posed by further deregulation of health and safety.

The MP, who sits on the Commons Deregulation Select Committee, said: "18,983 accidents at work, including 37 deaths, were reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the North West during 1995/6 costing businesses £575,581 in fines."

"Yet enforcement action taken by the HSE fell by 11% from 1,304 enforcement notices issued in the previous year to only 1,156. The advice local businesses need to protect their employees and their productivity is not being provided for by this Government."

Despite the warning from the Government-appointed chairman of the Health and Safety Commission that further cuts *"would hit our field activity... in a direct and visible way"*, the Government

has continued to slash the HSE budget. Cuts announced in its annual report in October last year will wipe £59m in real terms from its budget over the next four years.

"Local businesses and local employees are both set to lose out from Conservative deregulation of health and safety. The workforce in Pendle will pay the price with their health and good businesses will suffer as cowboy operators are allowed to run unchecked. A healthy workforce is a competitive, efficient workforce. The cost to businesses in the North West was £2.3 billion. This is a burden that good businesses cannot afford and one Labour will not accept."

For Immediate Release. No 16/97 Tues 14 January 1997

"LEGALISE CANNABIS" JIBE PROVOKES MP's FURY

A furious Gordon Prentice tonight hit out at Ribble Valley Tory MP Nigel Evans who has been claiming the Pendle MP is soft on drugs. The tit-for-tat started early today in the wake of the Pendle MP's lost adjournment debate on the treatment of multiple sclerosis. The MP says Government whips pulled the plug on their own business - the Crime (Sentences) Bill - in an attempt to embarrass the opposition.

The Pendle MP's adjournment debate was due to follow on after all remaining Government business had been dealt with. Now the Crime (Sentences) Bill will have to come back to the floor of the Commons at a future date.

The Pendle MP said: "Nigel Evans ought to lie down and take a tablet! He told the Lancashire Evening Telegraph today that I effectively sabotaged my own adjournment debate *"perhaps because his (i.e. Prentice's) call to legalise cannabis would have been deeply embarrassing to Jack Straw and his party leadership".*

"Nigel Evans has been hawking himself round every radio station today jubilant that the Commons wouldn't be discussing MS and inferring I am some kind of junkie. Conducting a debate in those terms is really quite pathetic."

"Last year, the Council of the Multiple Sclerosis Society carried a resolution which stated inter alia: "if cannabis or its derivatives are shown to have significant benefits, the Society will work to

ensure that legitimate prescribing can take place through the health service".

more follows

"LEGALISE CANNABIS" JIBE PROVOKES MP's FURY

"In fact, cannabis was regularly prescribed by doctors in this country in tincture form up until the passage of the Misuse of Drugs Act in 1971 which outlawed its medicinal use."

"Although cannabis remains banned for medicinal use, Nigel Evans' own Tory Government re-scheduled one of its active ingredients, dronabinol, in 1995. This disapplies the Misuse of Drugs Act and dronabinol can now be used for medicinal but not recreational purposes."

"Making cannabis a prescription drug would not be the "slippery slope" of Nigel Evans' fevered imagination. People do not believe the Government approves of heroine being used recreationally even though it is used in medicine as a pain killer."

"There are thousands of people with MS who say cannabis could help them cope with the symptoms of their condition. So why shouldn't medically qualified doctors be able to prescribe it as they were able to before 1971."

"We need a grown up debate on these issues and less of the infantile posturings from Nigel Evans whose top priority is to hear his voice on the air waves - regardless of whether he has anything sensible or worthwhile to say."

For Immediate Release. No 17/97 Wed 15 January 1997

THREAT TO LOCAL TEXTILE FINISHING FIRMS

The threat to Pendle's textile finishing firms from the decision of the European Commission to impose duties on the import of unbleached cotton cloth remains a real one says local MP, Gordon Prentice. But he says the Government is alive to the problem and will vote against any move to impose "definitive" duties to replace the provisional duties which came into effect on 21 November.

Local firms such as Albert Hartleys and John Wilman have been lobbying hard against the imposition of duties which will drive up the cost of their raw material. The MP commented: "I am

encouraged by the Government's stance. The Trade Minister, Anthony Nelson, has told me a majority of EU member states are against the proposal. If that is the case, it won't happen."

Note to editors: The Minister for Trade, Anthony Nelson, wrote to the Pendle MP on 13 January as follows: "Thank you for your letter of 18 December asking about further developments in the European Commission's investigation into unbleached cotton cloth from India, Egypt, China, Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey. Following the consultation with Sir Leon Brittan referred to in my reply, the Commission's decision on whether to proceed with provisional duties was deferred while they carried out a consultation with EU textile finishers. However, they decided to impose the provisional duties which came into effect on 21 November 1996.

The Commission will now complete their investigations and to this end they have initiated a further round of consultations of all EU textile finishers. We believe that the situation remains the same, in that the majority of member states are not in favour of the proposal. I trust that common sense will prevail in the light of the consultations, but if a vote for definitive duties does take place, the UK will attempt to ensure that this remains the position.

For Immediate Release. No 18/97 Wed 15 January 1997

NO FIRE CUTS IN BARLICK OR COLNE PLEDGES LANCASHIRE COUNCIL LEADER

The leader of Lancashire County Council, Louise Ellman, has pledged there will be no cuts in the number of pumps serving Barnoldswick and Colne. She made this unequivocal statement in a letter to her colleague, Pendle county councillor Joe French.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I hope this will lay the matter to rest once and for all. The Liberal Democrats here in Pendle have been scaring the wits out of people for years, predicting the loss of pumps in the two towns. I made my own views clear months ago when I said hell would freeze over before cuts were made to the fire cover in Barlick and Colne."

"I doubt if this will be enough for the local Liberal Democrats who are never happier than when they are alarming people. A sworn affidavit wouldn't be enough for them."

Note to Editors: The letter dated 13 January from Louise Ellman to Joe French reads: "I am writing following our discussions about fire covet in Pendle to confirm that no pumps will be removed from West Craven or Colne.

As you know, it has never been the intention of this County Council to remove fire pumps. Every year, the Tory Government forces cuts on this local authority. Despite this, we have always given high priority to fire services and have never had any intention of reducing fire cover.

This matter will formally be considered by the Fire Service and Public Protection Committee on 20th January, but I can categorically assure you that the Labour controlled County Council will not support the removal of any Pendle Borough fire pumps."

For Immediate Release. No 19/97 Wed 15 January 1997

PENDLE MP WARNS OF DANGER OF 5TH TORY TERM

A fifth Tory victory would turn Britain into a virtual one-party state - with a licence for them to do anything says local MP, Gordon Prentice. That will be the message of Labour's new campaign to be launched tomorrow.

The MP said: "If the Tories win again, they will take victory as a mandate to carry out the most extreme policies of the right wing - no matter what they promise to the contrary. In 1992 the Tories promised they would not raise taxes - but 22 Tory tax rises since then mean that a typical family will have paid over £2,000 in extra tax by this spring. The Tories cannot be believed again - they cannot be trusted on anything."

"Last week the Conservatives stepped up their campaign of lies and smears about Labour in an effort to sow fear and persuade people to stick with the devil they know. A fifth term will remove the last inhibitions of the Conservative Party's lunatic fringe. The hard-line right-wingers who increasingly control the Tory Party want: more privatisations of efficient, popular institutions like the Post Office and the London Underground."

"They want more commercialisation of the NHS, so that more and more people are forced to go private. They want more VAT extensions, on food and other essentials. And they want

withdrawal from the EU - which would cost 3.5 million British jobs. What a chilling prospect."

For Immediate Release. No 20/97 Thurs 16 January 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS HOVERS AT SIX YEAR LOW

The number of people out of work in Pendle in December and claiming benefit was 1,691 (4.7%) - up from the November figure of 1,620 (4.5%).

The figures for November 96 and December 96 are the lowest for six years. Unemployment in Pendle stood at 1,708 when John major became PM in November 1990 and it never fell below that figure until two months ago.

There were 1,370 men (6.3%) out of work and 321 (2.3%) women. Vacancies advertised at Nelson JobCentre stood at 450 and Colne 164.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The introduction of the Jobseeker's Allowance has depressed the total. The true level of unemployment has been masked by over thirty changes to the definition of the term."

The MP added: "Job insecurity is still rife. The recent announcements at Prestige and Smith and Nephew tell us more about what is going on than the official unemployment figures."

For Immediate Release. No 21/97 Thurs 16 January 1997

PENDLE MP PREDICTS VAT ON FOOD IF TORIES WIN

A Tory fifth term would mean more hurt for ordinary hard-working families according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. Backing Labour's new campaign, launched today, the MP says the Conservatives cannot be trusted on taxes. "22 Tory tax rises mean that a typical family has already paid over £2,000 in extra tax since the 1992 election."

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Now the Tories plan new increases in VAT - and they make no secret of it. If they get in again they will put VAT on food -which would mean £10.50 on the weekly shopping bill of a typical family."

The MP continued: "VAT is the Tories' favourite tax. In 1973 the Tories introduced VAT. In 1979 the Tories doubled VAT.
In 1991 the Tories increased VAT to 17.5 per cent.
In 1993 the Tories tried to put VAT on heating at 17.5 per cent. Labour cut it to eight per cent and is now committed to cutting it further to five per cent. In the 1996 Budget the Tories extended VAT again."

"Before each of the last four elections, the Tories have been challenged on VAT rises. On each occasion, they have promised there will be no VAT rise. Each time they accused Labour of scaring the public. But after each election they broke those promises and raised VAT. They simply cannot be trusted."

Note to Editors: In 1979 Geoffrey Howe promised. "We have absolutely no intention of doubling VAT" (On (21 April 1979) The Tories lied. After the election they doubled VAT.

In 1992 John Major promised, "We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT." (27/3/92)

PENDLE MP PREDICTS VAT ON FOOD IF TORIES WIN

The Tories lied. After the election they put VAT on heating.

Today Kenneth Clarke told BBC Radio 4, "It has never crossed my mind to put VAT on food.... I don't expect to live to see the day when any Government puts VAT on food in this country."

But he also said today, "I've never said we won't extend VAT." Indeed Clarke has made little secret of his ambition to extend the scope of VAT. He has said before that:
"we exempt far too many goods and services from VAT in this country" *(Independent,* 9/93)

"one of my options must be to extend the VAT base. The main candidates are food, children's clothes, transport, sewerage and newspapers. A powerful case for each of them can be made, and no amount of lobbying need put us off." (Budget statement, 30/11/93)

If the Tories get in again, Clarke's promise today will become as empty as the Tories' VAT promises in 1992. In a fifth term they will put VAT on food.

For Immediate Release. No 22/97 Wed 15 January 1997

GOVERNMENT PUTS PENDLE'S REFUSE COLLECTION UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

In a dramatic move, the Department of the Environment yesterday asked Pendle Council to explain why its refuse collection service is not meeting the financial targets set for it. If the Government is not convinced by the answers it is seeking from the council by 11 February, drastic steps could be taken to restrict the way in which the council awards work to its in-house DSO (Direct Service Organisation) in future.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I am obviously extremely concerned about this. The Environment Minister, Sir Paul Beresford, told me by letter that he had served a notice yesterday (14 January) on the Council under the compulsory competitive tendering legislation."

"I wait to hear what the Council intends to say about it all. But my first reaction is one of surprise that such a significant letter was not reported to the Council Committee which deals with refuse collection matters. I understand it was meeting last night."

"Clearly, people will be very concerned about this. It involves jobs of course and the future of one of the council's most visible services to the public."

For Immediate Release. No 23/97 Wed 15 January 1997

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today pressed the Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth to accept the "compelling case" for setting up a Food Standards Agency in the wake of the E Coli 0157 outbreak in Scotland - the worst ever.

A less virulent strain of the killer bug hit the MP's own Pendle constituency in December and despite detailed investigations the source of the outbreak remains a mystery.

In the Commons this afternoon the MP told the Secretary of State for Scotland that the Government's record on food safety was appalling. He said that since the passage of the 1990 Food Safety Act deaths from food poisoning had more than doubled (from 94

in 1990 to 203 in 1995) and there had been a five fold increase in E Coli 0157 outbreaks.

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "I told the Minister the case for an independent Food Standards Agency - quite separate from the Agriculture Department in Scotland and MAFF in England and Wales - was unanswerable."

"If he will not establish such an agency, an incoming Labour Government will. The record of this Government on food safety is enough to make anyone choke."

For Immediate Release. No 24/97. Thurs 16 January 1997

PENDLE MP DOUBTS EURO TIMETABLE

The timetable for moving to the new single currency - the Euro - is impossibly tight and the costs are going to be enormous says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

At Treasury Questions today the MP quizzed Chancellor Kenneth Clarke over the costs of moving to a single currency and the practicability of meeting the deadlines. If the UK decides to join the single currency, the new Euro notes and coins are due to be in circulation in January 2002 with the pound sterling disappearing in June of that year.

The MP asked the Chancellor: "Isn't it the case that with decimalisation in 1971 the Government of the day took the decision five years before the changeover and legislation was in place 4 years before. Why is it that the Chancellor thinks the country can make the momentous and irreversible change to the Euro in less time than it took to go decimal?"

Speaking after the exchange, the Pendle MP said: "The Chancellor clearly hasn't got a clue. Stage 3 of monetary union is due to start in 1999 with the notes and coins following three years later. But some of the most important details concerning the proposed changeover will not be known until next year. There are cash registers and hole in the wall machines to convert. Petrol pumps, ticket dispensers, sales, accounting, marketing, pricing systems and a million other things to change and we still don't know half the story. The Labour Party is pledged to have a referendum on the Single Currency and that is absolutely right."

For Immediate Release. No 25/97 Mon 20 January 1997

LEAR CORP "HAS NO PLANS TO CLOSE COLNE PLANT"

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been told by Roger Berry, the MD of the Lear Corporation's plant at Spring Gardens Mill in Colne, that the company "has no plans to close the Colne operation."

The MP wrote to the company in the wake of the recent press speculation that the company might be transferring production to its other plant at Tipton near Coventry.

Mr Berry told the MP: "Our company is a major supplier to the UK automotive industry and we are constantly under pressure to supply products from factories in close proximity to the automotive manufacturers. This has led to the establishment of a factory In Tipton in the West Midlands three years ago to serve Rover, Jaguar and Toyota."

He continued: "We are constantly under cost pressures and need to ensure that we have extremely efficient operations. This leads to a continual review of the way in which we conduct our business and currently we are continuing this process. We have not yet finalised our strategy for the period ahead but we have no plans to close the Colne operation. There could be some transfer of products from Colne to Tipton, and indeed vice versa, but we have some key processes at the Colne plant and we have not envisaged a withdrawal from that location."

The MP said: "This is reassuring. I shall be visiting the plant soon to hear the company's thinking. Clearly, we need to keep all the manufacturing jobs we can. We have had so many closures over recent years another major one just doesn't bear thinking about."

For Immediate Release. No 26/97 Mon 20 January 1997

COATES ESTATE GETS MOBILE LIBRARY

People living in the Coates Estate in Barnoldswick will soon have a mobile library calling in on them once a week thanks to the intervention of local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Lancashire County Council is making arrangements for the mobile library to stop in the vicinity of the Coates Community Centre every Friday lunchtime. The County Council will be

delivering a leaflet to every house and will include the start date for the new service.

Speaking from Westminster the MP said: "I am absolutely delighted about this. A number of pensioners living in the area approached me to say how much they would appreciate a mobile library calling by. I took the matter up with the County Librarian who visited the Coates Estate and the new service is going to begin soon."

"We are in the dawn of a new and exciting information age with computers and hi-tech, but books are as important as ever" said the MP.

For Immediate Release. No 27/97 Wed 22 January 1997

FIGHT TO SAVE LOCAL PETROL STATIONS

9,000 independent petrol retailers are backing a campaign for fair petrol pricing. And they want Government action to protect consumers.

Bruce Petter, the Director of the 9,000 strong Petrol Retailers Association (PRA - 01788 576 465) is backing a petition based campaign organised by local MP, Gordon Prentice, and Nigel Griffiths, Labour's Consumer Spokesman, to save local independent petrol stations which are being driven out of business by below-cost price cuts by the major companies and supermarkets.

The MP said: "All over the country, independent petrol stations are folding. After a summer of temporary petrol price cuts, a 10% increase has been forced on motorists but many local petrol stations are being driven to the wall. Selling below cost has an ignominious history as powerful companies undercut the prices of their opposition, drive them to the wall, then push prices up when the consumers have no choice."

"The failure of the President of the Board of Trade to order the Office of Fair Trading to hold an inquiry last June was a disgrace. The Commons Select Committee on Trade and Industry has called for an immediate investigation into petrol pricing and for the reform of competition law to protect consumers in the long term."

The MP added: "Esso have already admitted they are selling below cost at many of their sites."

For Immediate Release. No 28/97 Wed 22 January 1997

BBC NORTHWESTMINSTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be appearing on the region's political programme, BBC Northwestminster, this Sunday (26 January) at 1.30pm.

He will be discussing a number of topical issues with Tory MP, Matthew Banks.

For Immediate Release. No 29/97 Wed 22 January 1997

MP RE-ELECTED TO CHAIR KEY LABOUR COMMITTEE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, was last night re-elected to the chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee. The Committee has a wide-ranging brief which includes local government, planning and countryside issues.

The MP said: "I am delighted to have been re-elected by my colleagues to chair this Committee which has so many topical and controversial issues to consider."

ends

For Immediate Release. No 30/97 Wed 22 January 1997

MP CALLS FOR DUAL USE FOR NEW ROYAL YACHT

The Government's announcement in the Commons today that it intends to built a new Royal Yacht prompted a call from Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, for it to be "dual use" and open to visitors.

In the Commons this afternoon, the MP told Defence Secretary Michael Portillo that since the public was paying £60m for the new yacht, the public should be able to visit it. He also called for the vessel to be made available to schoolchildren from deprived

inner city areas when the yacht is not being used by the Queen which, he said, "will be most of the time".

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "The Government has dithered and delayed and did no forward planning so today's decision means there will be a five year gap with no Royal Yacht."

"The present Royal Yacht is tremendously underused. It must be right that the replacement should have a useful job of work to do when the Queen is not on board. We can't have it bobbing up and down in Portsmouth harbour for 11 months of the year with sailors doing nothing except polishing its brasses."

"Why can't it be used for special holidays for some of the nation's children. That would be a splendid dual use and I offer it as an example of lateral thinking! It should also be open to visitors. Buckingham Palace is now open to the public (admittedly at £8 per head) and so is Windsor Castle and the roof hasn't fallen in."

For Immediate Release. No 31/97 Wed 22 January 1997

MP RIDICULES HESELTINE OUTBURST

Michael Heseltine's outburst yesterday at the report by the Commission on Public Policy and British Business shows how desperate the Tories are becoming as even their traditional supporters desert them according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The group of leading City and industrial executives were addressed by the Labour Leader Tony Blair yesterday as a report by them endorsed key Labour proposals including the social chapter and the minimum wage. The MP commented: "Mr Heseltine, already smarting from having had to cadge a last-minute invitation to the conference, ludicrously accused these business people of being a *Labour front*."

He added: "It is insulting enough that Heseltine can claim that leading business figures behind this heavyweight report, such as supermarket chief David Sainsbury, British Airways Chief Executive Robert Ayling, and GEC Managing Director George Simpson, are Labour stooges."

"It is arrogant enough that Heseltine can confront GEC's George Simpson, as reported by today's *Financial Times* and pointedly remind him of the government's backing for the firm in MoD contracts and arms exports."

"The truth is that Michael Heseltine is rattled and panicking because he knows that more and more business people are turning against the Tories - for their failure to invest in education and training, for their bungling of public finances, for their policies of boom and bust, and for their childish divisions over Europe."

more follows

MP RIDICULES HESELTINE OUTBURST

Note to Editors: Business is turning to Labour because we are committed to,

- **education and training:** Labour will guarantee nursery education for all four year-olds and target provision for three year-olds; we have pledged to cut class sizes to 30 or under for five, six and seven year olds, using money saved from the assisted places scheme, and we will reform 'A' levels - all policies recommended by the Business Commission.

- **stability:** Labour has pledged to set tough rules for government spending and borrowing, ensure low inflation and strengthen the economy so that interest rates are as low as possible. The Business Commission calls for just such discipline, warning that "relatively unstable inflation and a more fluctuating business cycle have placed British-based companies at a severe disadvantage."

- **competition:** Labour will encourage competition by adopting a "prohibitive" approach, so that companies harmed by anti-competitive behaviour will get immediate protection under the law and offenders will face stringent financial penalties. These measures are in line with the Business Commission's recommendations on competition.

And Labour will take a leading role in Europe to ensure fair competition and the completion of the Single Market - especially its extension to new sectors where Britain's world-class companies are strong, such as telecommunications and aviation.

For Immediate Release. No 32/97 Thurs 23 January 1997

NELSON AND COLNE COLLEGE "BODY BLOW"

The announcement by Nelson and Colne College that it intends to make 37 FTE (full time equivalent) posts redundant in a major restructuring has shocked the area's MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking earlier today from Westminster, the MP said: "What is being proposed is not a cut or two at the margin but major surgery. I am extremely concerned about the implications for the College students and staff if this goes ahead."

"I shall be meeting the Principal, Kath Belton, on my return to the constituency from Westminster."

Note to Editors: The Board of Corporation, at the meeting on 20 January 1997, approved the statutory 30 days' consultation period with trade union representatives and staff, on the proposed new structure.

For Immediate Release. No 33/97. Thurs 23 January 1997

CADET FORCE IDEA GETS ITS MARCHING ORDERS

Today's announcement that the Government is considering extending the cadet force to all of the nation's schools is cut from the same cloth as their decision on the royal yacht: a large, uncosted spending commitment made for the sake of topping the running order on today's news bulletins says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The truth is that such an expansion of the cadet force would cost millions of pounds. Where is the money coming from? Labour recognises the value of organised outdoor activities for young people and would like to see those opportunities expanded but we are not going to fall in behind this kind of headline grabbing stunt."

The MP continued: "In stark contrast to the Government, our plans for young people are rigorously costed - for instance getting 250,000 long-term unemployed 18-25 year-olds off

benefit and into work, by using money from a windfall tax on the privatised utilities."

"The discipline of government involves tough choices - for instance whether you spend £60 million on a new royal yacht, or on 60,000 extra NHS operations, or use it towards the goal of a cut in the starting rate of tax for the lowest paid families, as we have promised."

For Immediate Release. No 34/97 Thurs 23 January 1997

MP CALLS FOR EARLY DEBATE ON "CRISIS IN FE"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called for an urgent debate on the crisis in further education following news of major job losses in his local college.

This afternoon, he told Leader of the House Tony Newton - the man responsible for the Commons business timetable - that 37 jobs were being lost from Nelson and Colne College in the heart of his Pendle constituency.

The MP said that since incorporation in 1993, when FE colleges were removed from local authority control, no fewer than one in five jobs in the sector had been lost. He told the Minister that even the Government's Chief Inspector had recognised in his latest annual report that the trend to part time staff was affecting standards.

The MP said afterwards: "I don't want the young people in my area losing out. A good education is the biggest single factor affecting future earnings and job prospects. In Pendle we want the best."

For Immediate Release. No 35/97 Thurs 23 January 1997

MP TELLS MINISTER TO ALLOW DOCTORS TO PRESCRIBE CANNABIS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, again stepped into electorally hazardous waters by telling Home Office Minister, Tom Sackville, that the controlled drug cannabis should be available to medically qualified doctors who wish to prescribe it to patients.

In the Commons this afternoon, he rounded on the Minister by asking why it was apparently impossible for cannabis to be prescribed by a doctor in 1997 when it was quite lawful for medical use before 1971 when it was often given in tincture form.

The MP said: "I am told that many people suffering from MS, arthritis and other conditions find relief with cannabis. And isn't it the case - and this was confirmed by the Minister two days ago - that a derivative of cannabis, dronabinol, has recently been found to combat nausea in patients undergoing chemotherapy for cancer and is now permitted for medical use - 26 years after cannabis was banned from hospitals."

The MP said there was a compelling case for leaving it to the doctors to prescribe the drugs they consider appropriate without the interference of Ministers.

Speaking after the Commons exchange, the MP said: "There is always the danger that people will seek to misrepresent my views on this controversial subject. I can understand it if people are ignorant of the facts. However, there are those who know I am absolutely right but still peddle this "soft on drugs" rubbish."

For Immediate Release. No 36/97 Mon 27 January 1997

TORY MANIFESTO: "SCRAPING THE BARREL" says MP

The Cabinet meeting today scraped the barrel for ideas to put into the Conservative election manifesto according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "Ministers are casting around for new ideas after the failure of their plans for education, health and law and order. They can only come up with mad-cap right wing schemes already discarded as unworkable. There are hints that Post Office privatisation may be resurrected but that went down like a lead balloon last time it was floated in Pendle."

"In July 1993, I recall delivering Pendle's Post Office petition - containing the names and addresses of over 8,000 local people - to 10 Downing Street. The petition was part of a nationwide protest backed by 298,970 people against plans to stop pension and benefit payments at Post Offices. Pendle's protest was one of the largest in the country and represented a big slice of the total

for the North West region (51,772). It also reflected fears about the privatisation of the Post Office."

"This Government has clearly run out of steam. The number of failing schools has doubled since 1994. Their internal market in health costs an extra £4m a day on red tape - enough for 4,000 operations. And law and order has been a disaster. Crime has doubled since 1979 but the number of convictions and cautions has fallen."

For Immediate Release. No 37/97 Mon 27 January 1997

KEY DATES IN ELECTION COUNTDOWN

The following election countdown has been compiled by the Press Association:

January 30: Focus on Tory internal divisions as loyalists in Reigate have another tilt at trying to unseat Euro-sceptic MP Sir George Gardiner, whose criticisms of the Prime Minister's European policy have created sparks.

February 4: A keynote speech by John Major in Brussels is likely to be his last pre-campaign, detailed statement of the Government's position on the future of the EU and the single currency.

February 5: The last day on which the writ for the Wirral South by-election can be moved, if the Tories wish to meet their pledge to hold the contest "within the Parliamentary conventions" - ie a new MP in place within three months of the death of the sitting MP. By-elections are often moved on Tuesdays, though, so trigger could be Tuesday February 4.

February 8: Labour leader Tony Blair will use platform at party's local government conference in Nottingham to make an important pre-election speech.

February 10: The national launch of Labour's small business manifesto - just one of a string of business initiatives which Mr Blair will use to woo industry's votes in the run-up to the election. If it looks like a May 1 election, the events will culminate in mid-March with the launch of Labour's Business Plan for Britain. If it is March 20, the launch will be brought forward.

February 14: John Major to address Welsh Tory conference at Llangollen. The event has been brought forward from its usual June/July date to enable the Tories to use the event as a pre-election "rally".

February 16: The new electoral register comes in. Without it, thousands of voters who have moved house since the last register was compiled could have difficulty in being able to vote. It was always in the interests of all the principal parties to hold the election after this date in order to maximize turn-out.

KEY DATES IN ELECTION COUNTDOWN

February 20 and 21: Conservatives' local government conference in Birmingham.

February 24: Should Mr Major want a March 20 election, this is the last day on which he can issue the writ. It allows for the minimum period of time of 17 days on which the Commons would normally sit - one Northern Ireland Bank holiday is excluded - prior to an election.

February 26-8: Labour's Welsh conference in Llandudno, where the party's plans for devolution will come under scrutiny.

February 27: The likely date for the Wirral South by-election, where Tories have a 8,183-vote majority to defend. This contest will not take place even if the writ has been moved, should Mr Major have plumped for the March 20 election-date option and moved by February 24.

March 7-8: Scottish Labour conference in Inverness.

March 7-9: Liberal Democrats' second largest party gathering of the year, its Spring conference in Cardiff.

March 14-15: The Tories' second largest annual gathering of the year - Central Council in Bath. Before the 1992 election, this meeting was used as a springboard to the campaign. The same could happen this time round.

March 30: Easter Sunday. The bank holidays, school and college holidays around this date make an April 10 election unlikely as they would disrupt the campaign and could "lose" canvassers to Easter breaks at a critical period.

April 6: The new financial year begins, triggering Ken Clarke's 1p cut in the standard rate of income tax to 23p in the pound. But will the effects register in time for polling day?

April 8: The last possible day on which John Major could call a May 1 election - he is on record as stating he will not call an election any later. With local elections due on that date, going any longer - and he could theoretically call an election for as late as May 22 - would be a massive risk, with Tories likely to lose heavily in local polls, damaging morale for the general election.

May 1: Election day? The Prime Minister has done little to dissuade voters that this is his preferred date.

Bookmakers William Hill today put the odds on a May election at evens - still the most likely date, they believe.
March is now 5-4 with April 3-1 - and February is 50-1.

For Immediate Release. No 38/97 Mon 27 January 1997

MP CALLS ON FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL "TO LOOK AT THE BOOKS" AT N&C COLLEGE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has asked the body which distributes cash to Colleges - the Further Education Funding Council - to review the finances of Nelson and Colne College which was plunged into turmoil last week following the announcement that 37 posts are to be axed in a major restructuring designed to save cash.

The MP, who addressed staff and students at the college gates this morning, said he was mystified as to why the decision had been taken now. He said that in a few months time there would be a General Election with a Labour Government pledged to put 250,000 young people into work or into education and training - in places such as Nelson and Colne College.

Speaking afterwards on his return to Westminster, the MP said: "The latest report from the Further Education Funding Council makes dire reading. The problems at N&C are severe but they are not unique. All over the country colleges are moving into deficit."

"I want the FEFC to look at the books at Nelson and Colne. And I shall be pressing Ministers for an early debate here at Westminster. The Colleges are being expected to behave like limbo dancers, getting their costs ever lower. As the FEFC annual

report makes crystal clear, an increasing number of them are not making it and the Government is squarely to blame."

Note to Editors: The following is an extract from the recently published (Jan 1997) annual report of the Further Education Funding Council:

The Council (Further Education Funding Council) has continued to monitor closely the financial health of individual colleges and the sector as a whole.

MP CALLS ON FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL "TO LOOK AT THE BOOKS" AT N&C COLLEGE

The figures for 1995/6 show that financial health is deteriorating. The number of colleges with an operating deficit rose from 242 in 1994/5 to an estimated 292 in 1995/6. The proportion of colleges with weak financial positions rose from 6 to 13 per cent. Twenty three colleges required Council support in the form of temporary adjustments to their payment profiles compared with 10 in 1994/5 and one in 1993/4.

In most cases, financial difficulties at colleges can be attributed at least in part to weaknesses in governance and management information systems. However, all colleges are coming under increasing financial pressure for a variety of reasons. Foremost amongst these is the scale of the efficiency gains which colleges have been required to make in each year since incorporation. The Council estimates that the average gain in 1995/6 will have been 9% and that the total average gain in the three years since incorporation is now 20%. Colleges which inherited average levels of funding above the sector average are having to make even higher efficiency gains. The most frequent cause of financial problems at colleges is difficulty in achieving these gains.

Factors which are increasing the size of the efficiency savings to take them above those assumed by allocations to the Council include: declining income from sources other than the Council, in particular ESF (European Social Fund) funds; the cost of implementing redundancies and early retirements; new employment rights for part time staff; increases in employer contributions to pension schemes; and the increased productivity gains required to pay off inherited debts.

Colleges are achieving efficiency gains through restructuring and staff redundancies, including teaching hours on student programmes; increasing class sizes; new staff contracts;

reductions in premises costs and overheads; and reductions in revenue spending in buildings and equipment. Where colleges have not been able to absorb the efficiency gain implied in their funding allocations, they have generated operating deficits. The annual deficit incurred by the sector rose from £10m in 1993/4 to £101m in 1994/5 and stood at an estimated £119m in 1995/6. A deficit of this order cannot be sustained for more then a few years. (Source: Annual Report FEFC. January 1997. page 35)

For Immediate Release. No 39/97 Thurs 30 January 1997

MP SAYS FOOD SAFETY SUPREMO IS "TOO LITTLE TOO LATE"

The government's announcement that it will appoint a food safety adviser is long overdue. But what they are proposing is a pathetic gesture that goes nowhere near far enough says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP's East Lancashire constituency was hit by an e coli outbreak in December.

Speaking in the House of Commons this afternoon, the MP said: "The Government's statement is completely fraudulent given its neglect of food safety enforcement. 22,414 improvement notices were served on premises subject to the food safety laws in 1992 yet this figure had shrunk to 2,314 in 1995. And it is not because food shops are now so clean and hygienic that we can eat our breakfasts off the floors of them all."

"Since the passage of the 1990 Food Safety Act deaths from food poisoning have more than doubled (from 94 in 1990 to 203 in 1995) and there has been a five fold increase in E Coli 0157 outbreaks."

"In my own area in Pendle, the number of visits to premises subject to the food safety laws dropped from 1,241 in 1992 to 728 in 1995 and the number of actual inspections from 1,135 to 697 over the same period. And to cap it all, on Monday the Government proposes to cut the amount of money available to local authorities to run their environmental health services."

"The Government's announcement today is another PR stunt. We need an independent Food Standards Agency to monitor the enforcement of food safety regulations." *more follows*

FOOD SAFETY

Note to Editors: Inspections of food premises

All District Councils. England

year	improvement notices issued	prohibition orders	emergency prohibition orders	closures
1992	22,414	24	112	399
1993	10,820	33	86	160
1994	3,628	23	68	99
1995	2,314	8	37	134

Total informal warnings: 88,619 in 1992 and 86,349 in 1995

In Pendle

year	inspections	informal warnings	improvement notices
1992	1,135	625	34
1993	1,041	596	26
1994	887	447	15
1995	697	284	18

Source: Statistics from returns of inspections carried out on food premises in each local authority area. Deposited in the HoC Library by MAFF.

For Immediate Release. No 40/97 Thurs 30 January 1997

GET ON YOUR BIKE! says MP

PHOTOCALL: Friday 31st January at 11am, Unit 6, Pendle Industrial Estate, Southfield Street, Nelson

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be peddling for Pendle tomorrow when he visits Pendle Bikes at 11am. The firm is a family business which makes bike carriers for cars.

The MP said: "I am a keen cyclist - but only when the weather is good! We need to tell more people to get on their bikes! It will do them a power of good besides helping our local economy."

For Immediate Release. No 41/97 Thurs 30 January 1997

PHOTOCALL: MP TURNS THE HEAT ON COUNCIL
Saturday, 1 February at 1.30pm

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting the home of Mr and Mrs Kendall at 132 Oak Street, Colne - a council property without central heating.

Note to Editors: on 8 January, the MP told the local press: **HORSFIELD RESIDENTS IN BIG CHILL.** Shivering council tenants in Colne's Horsfield ward must be wondering what happened to the hundreds of thousands of pounds which swelled the coffers of Pendle Council when it sold its stake in the local bus company to Stagecoach last year.

In Pendle there are 225 homes rented from the council which do not have central heating and no fewer than 136 are in Horsfield. Local Labour councillor Sarah Hill is up in arms about the situation saying that in many of the houses there is only one gas fire flickering in a corner.

With another icy Arctic blast scything its way through the area, local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I pressed the Council ages ago for information on how it intended to spend the money it received from last year's controversial sale of Burnley and Pendle buses. I was told it would be used in support of the council's capital programme but that kind of vagueness is simply not good enough."

"I want to know, clearly and precisely, where the bus money is to be spent. For months the whole issue has been shrouded in the most absurd secrecy. The people in Horsfield have been told by my Liberal controlled council there is no money for central heating. Not so. The money is there and we should know what the Council's priorities are when it comes to spending it."

For Immediate Release. No 42/97 Tues 4 February 1997

MINISTER REFUSES TO INTERVENE IN NELSON AND COLNE COLLEGE CRISIS

Education Minster, James Paice, yesterday told local MP Gordon Prentice that the Government had no intention of intervening in

the Nelson and Colne College cash crisis in which 37 jobs are to disappear.

The Minister said he would not instruct the Further Education Finding Council to review the College's decision. He said: "It is for colleges in the further education sector such as Nelson and Colne to mange their resources, including staff, as they see fit in the light of changing needs and circumstances."

The Pendle MP commented: "This is the politics of Pontius Pilate. The Government has washed its hands of all responsibility and says it is up to the FEFC. Yet the FEFC is on record saying in its annual report published only last month there is a crisis in FE funding with over 200 colleges running deficits. I am still waiting for a substantive reply from the FEFC about the crisis at my local college. I want to know what action they are proposing to take."

Note to Editors: The Education Minister told Mr Prentice yesterday: "Colleges are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for managing their own financial affairs. However, under its financial memorandum with the Department (for Education and Employment), the Further Education Funding Council is required to keep the financial health of colleges under review."

The MP has called for a debate on the crisis in FE funding.

For Immediate Release. No 43/97 Wed 5 February 1997

PENDLE MP WINS FRESH DEBATE ON MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has succeeded in his bid to get a new debate on the treatment of Multiple Sclerosis. He had planned to use his adjournment debate on the 13 January to throw a spotlight on the problems facing people with MS. However, his debate was torpedoed by Government whips who unexpectedly pulled the plug early on Government business. The MP's debate was due to follow on afterwards. His second chance comes next Monday - 10 February.

The MP said: "I am naturally delighted that the Speaker recognised that my debate on MS was the victim of Government dirty tricks." He continued: "There are serious issues which need to be addressed. Perhaps the most compelling concerns the

availability of effective treatment which depends on the lottery of where a person lives in the UK."

Note to Editors: One in every two people knows someone who has multiple sclerosis. There are over 80,000 people with MS in the UK and a further 2,500 are diagnosed with MS each year. MS is a disease of the central nervous system (CNS) characterised by a gradual deterioration of neurological function that can lead to permanent disability. In MS the disease process causes damage to the nerves in the brain and spinal cord. Most of the major nerves in the body are surrounded by a sheath of *myelin,* a fatty substance which acts as an electrical insulator facilitating the efficient transmission of nervous impulses between the brain and spinal cord and the nerves, which in turn control the muscles of the body. In MS, there is damage to the myelin sheath in the CNS leading to impaired conduction of messages from the brain and spinal cord to the muscles.

For Immediate Release. No 44/97 Tuesday 4 February 1997

COMMONS CLASH OVER PENDLE'S HOUSING CRISIS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily in the Commons this afternoon with Environment Minister James Clappison over the state of Pendle's housing stock. He told the Minister Pendle had more housing built before 1919 than any Council area in England outside inner London.

The MP told the Minister that 25,000 properties in Pendle are in need of repair and over 5,400 fail to meet the current fitness standard. He said: "Given that the Minister presumably wants people to live in warm comfortable housing, why is it that the Government's policies have failed so abysmally in North East Lancashire?"

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "The Minister had no answer but waffled on about council's targeting resources to where they are needed. But this Government got rid of mandatory improvement grants and Pendle Council doesn't have the cash - even with the money it received from the sale of the buses - to do everything."

"The Council's own Housing Strategy 1997 document estimates that it would cost a staggering £40m to put things to right. We

are now reaping the whirlwind of the decades of housing neglect."

"Of the top ten local authorities with the most houses built before 1919, five are in inner London and three are in East Lancashire. And the state of disrepair here is ten times worse than in London."

Table follows

COMMONS CLASH OVER PENDLE'S HOUSING CRISIS

Note to Editors: The 10 district councils with the highest percentage of their housing stock built before 1919

Rank	Council	Percentage
1	Hammersmith & Fulham	74.2%
2	Kensington & Chelsea	70.7%
3	**Pendle**	**67.2%**
4	Westminster	62.6%
5	Hyndburn	61.7%
6	Teesdale	60.8%
7	Eden	60.3%
8	Camden	58.5%
9	Islington	58.3%
10	Burnley	55.7%

For Immediate Release. No 45/97 Tuesday 4 February 1997

MP BLASTS GOVERNMENT RECORD ON FOOD SAFETY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, made a ferocious attack on Environment Ministers last night in the annual debate on the Revenue Support Grant - the cash which the Government allocates to councils nationwide. With Pendle's E Coli outbreak at the front of his mind, he said the Government's record on food safety was an absolute disgrace.

He rounded on Tory MP David Curry - his next door neighbour in Skipton and Ripon - claiming that cash for the grant's "other services block" which includes food safety inspections was to be

cut by £3m. He said this would have an impact on council officers who "inspect greasy spoon cafes throughout Britain".

The MP said: "I have examined the food safety inspection figures for all districts in England. In 1992, 22,414 improvement notices were served; by 1995, 2,314, a tenth of that number were served. In Pendle, in 1992 there were 1,241 visits to cafes and food shops by environmental health officers. In 1995 there were 728 visits."

"It is one of the services that does not receive the Ritz treatment but it is important and should be regarded as such by the Environment Secretary (John Gummer) who famously ordered his daughter to sink her teeth into a hamburger saying there was no problem with food safety in Britain when people were first nervous about BSE. We now have e coli and listeria to worry about. In 1990 there were 90 deaths from food poisoning in Britain. In 1995, there were 202."

"In Blackpool under 40% of food premises were inspected in 1995.

For Immediate Release. No 46/97. Tues 4 February 1997

MP WELCOMES WIRRAL CONTEST

The Tories yesterday officially launched their campaign for the Wirral South by-election - and immediately started falling apart according to Pendle's Labour MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Michael Heseltine admitted that he expects the Tories to lose. He said *"There are a lot of people around who see by-elections as an opportunity to kick the government, and we would expect to see that."* Too right!"

He went on: "But later Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell claimed that the Tories would win - and was then forced to backtrack by admitting that *"During an election campaign, you're well advised to avoid predicting the result.""*

The Pendle MP added: "The Tories have seen the opinion polls and know that they face defeat in Wirral. And it is not even in the list of the top eighty Conservative seats we are targetting. But in Wirral as elsewhere, ordinary families have had enough of their lies and broken promises. But what we really want is a

General Election. It can't come too soon so far as I am concerned."

"There is so much that is wrong that needs to be put to right. Every week without the election being called is a week wasted."

For Immediate Release. No 47/97 Tues 4 February 1997

PENDLE MP ACCUSES GUMMER OF DISSEMBLING OVER "INCREASE" IN CASH FOR EDUCATION

Environment Secretary, Jon Gummer, was told in the Commons last night that his promise of a 3.6% increase in cash for education authorities was fictional.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, stung by comments about Lancashire County Council, claimed the 3.6% only made sense if councils spent more on education than the Government wanted them to.

The MP said: "This 3.6% is only correct if the education spending increase is loaded on to council tax payers. If all education authorities throughout Britain had to spend at the SSA (the standard spending assessment) level, which is the level that the Government thinks is right for all authorities, there would be not an increase next year, but a decrease per pupil of £41. How on earth can we believe anything the Secretary of State says when he is prepared to dissemble on that gargantuan scale."

"In Lancashire, we are already spending 7 per cent above SSA. Three quarters of all local education authorities are already spending above SSA so the Minister should take that 3.6% and stuff it up his jumper. It is completely wrong."

The MP added: "A primary school child in Essex receives £112 more than a primary school child in Lancashire. In Essex, a secondary school pupil receives £145 per year more than a pupil in Lancashire. It is little wonder that teachers in my constituency and throughout Lancashire are up in arms and infuriated with the unfairness of it all."

For Immediate Release. No 48/97 Wed 5 February 1997

MP RIDICULES PM's SOCIAL CHAPTER FEARS

John Major's claim that the social chapter will cost 500,000 jobs is without any foundation and the Tories know it according to local MP Gordon Prentice. Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "Already last night the Tories were backtracking; unable to offer any evidence Downing Street said the claim was 'illustrative'. What it illustrates is that the Tories will once again run an election campaign based on lies and scare stories. The real European threat on jobs is the 3.5 million jobs which would go if the Tories pulled out of Europe."

"The truth about the social chapter is that it contains only two measures - on unpaid parental leave and consultation rights in large firms operating across Europe. In addition:

• many highly successful British companies have voluntarily introduced these measures. British Telecom, United Biscuits, Nat West and ICI all have European works councils.

• under John Major the UK has 1 million fewer jobs and male unemployment is currently the 7th highest of the 15 EU countries.

• Labour have made clear we would not agree to any further measures being included in the social chapter if they would damage British competitiveness. But the Tories' empty chair policy means Britain's arguments go unheeded.

• The social chapter contains a specific commitment to "avoid imposing administrative, financial and legal constraints in a way which would hold back the creation of small and medium sized undertakings"

For Immediate Release. No 49/97 6 February 1997

PHOTOCALL: COLDWELL INN ACTIVITY CENTRE at 1pm on Friday 7th February.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting Caldwell Inn Activity Centre, Back Lane, Southfield, Burnley BB10 3RG tomorrow, Friday, at 1pm.

Coldwell Inn is a registered charity. It is a highly motivated residential centre used primarily by physically challenged people and those with learning difficulties. Coldwell Inn caters for their recreational needs.

Coldwell Inn operates with the help of carefully selected young offenders - not as residential guests but as Probation Service clients on orders of the Court, coming on a daily basis to undertake the essential back up services as an alternative to custody.

For Immediate Release. No 50/97. Monday 10 February 1997

PENDLE'S CHILDREN HAVE WORST DENTAL HEALTH IN LANCASHIRE

Children in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale have the worst teeth in Lancashire according to figures extracted by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Although there has been a big improvement over recent years, the MP says the area's young people are still way behind the rest of the county when it comes to dental health.

Speaking this weekend in Barnoldswick, the MP said: "Unfortunately, the teeth of children in the North West are worse than most other regions of the country - and within the North West we in East Lancashire are worse than our neighbours. We need a concerted and highly focused drive to improve the dental health of our children. Good, strong healthy teeth should be the norm for everyone. And NHS dentists should be easily available. Sometimes I think it is easier to strike gold in the Klondike than to get on the list of an NHS dentist."

Note to Editors: The British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry conducts annual surveys of dental caries prevalence in children within a 4 yearly cycle comprising those aged 5,12 and 14 throughout Great Britain. BASCD began these surveys in 1985/6 in England and Wales. The tables show the number of decayed, missing and filled (dmft) in the deciduous teeth only of 5 year olds and in the permanent teeth only of twelve and fourteen year olds in Lancashire.

Tables of dmft (decayed missing and filled) for 5 year old, 12 year
old and 14 year old surveys carried out for Lancashire as part of the BASCD (British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry) co-ordinated surveys.

Tables follow. Source: answers to Parliamentary Questions tabled by Gordon Prentice MP from Health Minister Gerald Malone MP on 4 February 1997.

more follows

Mean number of DMFT of 5 year olds (deciduous teeth only) in Lancashire since 1987/8

Health authority	1985/6	1987/8	1989/90	1991/2	1993/4	1995/6 @
Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble	2.62	2.22	2.50	2.51	3.06	2.57
Blackpool, Wyre & Fylde	2.46	2.00	2.16	1.97	2.62	1.97
Burnley, Pendle & Rossen-dale	2.58	3.37	3.10	3.31	3.23	3.12
Chorley & South Ribble	2.03	1.61	1.90	1.68	1.90	2.06
Lancaster	2.52	2.41	2.75	2.71	2.79	2.53
Preston	3.83	2.05	2.43	1.92	2.68	2.83
West Lancs	2.37	1.67	1.89	1.34	2.46	2.18

@ verified but not published

Mean number of dmft of 12 yr olds (permanent teeth) in Lancs since 88/89

Health authority	1988/89	1992/93
Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble	2.21	1.88
Blackpool, Wyre & Fylde	2.03	1.74
Burnley, Pendle & Rossen-dale	3.09	2.45
Chorley & South Ribble	1.59	1.43
Lancaster	2.16	1.71
Preston	1.87	2.08
West Lancs	1.79	1.46

Mean number of dmft of 14 yr olds (permanent teeth) in Lancs since 86/87

Health authority	1986/87	1990/91	1994/95
Blackburn Hyndburn & Ribble	4.21	2.64	3.35
Blackpool, Wyre & Fylde	3.90	2.99	2.35
Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale	5.60	4.87	3.78
Chorley & South Ribble	3.83	2.35	2.58
Lancaster	3.78	3.67	2.62
Preston	4.08	2.32	2.69
West Lancs	4.19	2.37	2.52

For Immediate Release. No 51/97. Thurs 6 February 1997

GREAT WESTERN TRAINS TAKES OVER NORTH WEST RAILWAYS

Great Western Trains which runs services from London Paddington to Bristol has won the franchise to run trains in the North West for a seven year period. Great Western is part owned by First Bus.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Rail privatisation is a disaster waiting to happen. GMT won the franchise on the basis that it would require less in the way of public subsidy than any other bidder. They will be getting £184,900,000 in public money in year one dropping to £125m in year 7 and they say they will introduce 70 new diesel units and operate the same number of train miles. Whether the Colne spur line survives must be questionable."

"The company will be able to make money out of this franchise by massively expanding the number of train passengers or by ruthlessly cutting costs."

"Rail privatisation has been a gigantic con trick. The entire West Coast main line could have been modernised and upgraded for the amount of money squandered by the Government on the privatisation process itself. The lawyers and accountants have been laughing all the way to the bank."

For Immediate Release. No 52/97. Friday 7 February 1997

PRENTICE LAUNCHES ATTACK ON FUEL POVERTY IN PENDLE

Almost a third of local households are without central heating ranking Pendle at 66 out of 563 Parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales (where 1 is the largest number without CH and 563 is the fewest number).

The figures have been compiled by local MP, Gordon Prentice, in the wake of the furore over the refusal by the Liberal controlled Pendle Council to install central heating in council homes using some of the cash from the controversial sale of the buses last year. Last week, the Liberals overturned their previous decision and money has now been found.

Prentice said: "30.5% of households in Pendle do not have central heating compared with the average in England and Wales of 18.5%. It is not as if we live in the balmy tropics. We live in a part of the country where cold and damp weather is commonplace. The previous decision of the council was quite indefensible."

"The high cost of energy and the large number of homes with inadequate heating systems means that inability to pay for enough heat and light is a real problem for many hard working families. And it is estimated that lower income households spend a greater proportion of their income on energy: as much as 10% each week as against 4% for middle income households. Customers on Pre Payment Meters pay in most cases 5% more than other customers for their electricity."

The MP continued: "An incoming Labour Government will launch an all out attack on fuel poverty. We will reduce VAT on fuel from

PRENTICE LAUNCHES ATTACK ON FUEL POVERTY

8% to 5%. We want to see tougher, more efficient regulation of the privatised utilities to ensure that consumers get a fair share of the profits of the utilities in lower bills. We will start the phased release of capital receipts from the sale of council houses to allow local authorities to build new homes or improve existing ones - and we will bring in a national self financing domestic

energy efficiency scheme which will create jobs, reduce harmful emissions and cut fuel bills"

"Our positive and practical plans for cheaper, more efficiently used energy supplies will make a real difference to the budgets of thousands of people in Pendle and nationwide."

ends

Note to Editors: The constituency of Liverpool West Derby has the highest percentage of homes without central heating (54.4%) and Blyth Valley, the lowest (4.5%). The average for England and Wales is 18.5%

For Immediate Release. No 53/97 Thurs 6 February 1997

PRENTICE CALLS FOR REVIEW OF THE LAW ON DATA PROTECTION

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice this afternoon called for an urgent review of the law on data protection following complaints from furious constituents who had received a letter from the Prime Minister warning them of the alleged dangers posed by an incoming Labour Government.

Speaking in the Commons, the MP told the Government's business manager, Tony Newton, that an early debate was needed as people were outraged that information about their shareholdings - information they considered private - had been secured by the Conservative Party and was used in a mailshot to two and a half million people with shares in the privatised utilities.

The MP told Tony Newton, the Leader of the House, of his old friend and colleague, Harry Lees, and the shock felt by his widow who had received a letter addressed to her late husband from the Chairman of the Conservative Party, Brian Mawhinney. The letter - to a life long member of the Labour Party and a former Labour councillor - said a donation would help provide "an essential part of the Conservative election machine".

Speaking after the exchange, the MP said: "These mail shots are getting completely out of hand. The Conservatives have managed to get their hands on information that the overwhelming majority of people feel should be private. It is time the Data Protection Registrar acted to prevent these abuses. It is time the law was tightened up."

For Immediate Release. No 54/97 Tues 11 February 1997

MINISTER ADOPTS "WAIT AND SEE" POLICY ON TRAFFIC GROWTH IN PENDLE

Transport Minister John Watts, told the Commons yesterday that no assessment had been made of the amount of traffic currently using the trans Pennine M62 which was likely to transfer to the M65/A56 after November this year when the M6/M65 link up is completed.

Mr Watts said: "No assessment has been made of the amount of traffic that may transfer to the M65-A56 from the M62 upon completion of the M65 Blackburn southern bypass. However, completion of the M65 will result in a 10% increase in traffic on the existing M65 immediately east of Blackburn."

His reply infuriated local MP, Gordon Prentice, who said that many motorists would look for an alternative way of getting to the north east from the M6 and may use the M65/A56 and that traffic projections should have been worked up before now. The MP continued: "Does the Minister understand the tremendous concern of people in Colne that thousands of vehicles will be dumped on their doorstep? The Government has done absolutely nothing about trunking the A56 which could offer those people some comfort. When is the Minister likely to undertake a general review of the trunk road network because at the moment the silence is deafening?"

The Minister relied: "I am aware of the concerns in Colne to which the Hon Gentleman refers, not least because I had an opportunity to discuss them with local councillors when I visited the constituency at the Hon Gentleman's invitation. I undertook that once the M65 Blackburn southern bypass was completed, we

More follows

would monitor traffic flows and that I would keep an open mind about whether a case could be made by the local highway authority for further trunking of the local road network. It is sensible for us to consider such possibilities in the light of evidence, rather than on the basis of speculation."

Speaking after the exchange, Prentice said: "The fact is we have no clear idea how much additional traffic is going to disgorge from the end of the M65 at Colne. We should have had detailed projections and estimates when all we have is a blank sheet of paper. Ministers have had ages to do the necessary work."

For Immediate Release. No 55/97 Thurs 13 February 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE VISITING THE LEAR CORPORATION, SPRING GARDENS MILL, COLNE at 3.30pm on Friday 14 February

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be meeting Peter Berry, the Managing Director, tomorrow Friday and will be touring the plant.

Note to Editors: The Lear Corporation hit the headlines last month amid speculation that the plant might close. The MP issued the following Press Release on 20 January: "Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been told by Roger Berry, the MD of the Lear Corporation's plant at Spring Gardens Mill in Colne, that the company "has no plans to close the Colne operation."

The MP wrote to the company in the wake of the recent press speculation that the company might be transferring production to its other plant at Tipton near Coventry. Mr Berry told the MP: "Our company is a major supplier to the UK automotive industry and we are constantly under pressure to supply products from factories in close proximity to the automotive manufacturers. This has led to the establishment of a factory In Tipton in the West Midlands three years ago to serve Rover, Jaguar and Toyota."

He continued: "We are constantly under cost pressures and need to ensure that we have extremely efficient operations. This leads to a continual review of the way in which we conduct our business and currently we are continuing this process. We have not yet finalised our strategy for the period ahead but we have no plans to close the Colne operation. There could be some transfer of products from Colne to Tipton, and indeed vice versa, but we have some key processes at the Colne plant and we have not envisaged a withdrawal from that location."

The MP said: "This is reassuring. I shall be visiting the plant soon to hear the company's thinking. Clearly, we need to keep all the

manufacturing jobs we can. We have had so many closures over recent years another major one just doesn't bear thinking about."

For Immediate Release. No 56/97 Wed 12 February 1997

LONE MOTHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE THE POOREST IN THE UK says PENDLE MP

There are 220,000 lone parents in the North West - amounting to 24% of all households in the region with dependent children (national average 20%). 58% of the region's lone parents are not in employment, receiving £1.1 billion in benefit.

Commenting on the figures, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "There are one million lone mothers in Britain dependent on Income Support bringing up 1.5 million children. While more married women are working, fewer lone mothers are now working."

"47% of lone mothers are living on less than £100 per week compared to only 4% of married couples. I want to see much more done to get lone mothers into work if that is their choice. A Labour Government will invite lone mothers when their youngest child is in the second term of full time school to come to the JobCentre fro help with job search, advice on training opportunities and child care."

"I want to see targets set for the Training and Enterprise Councils for the number of out of work lone mothers receiving training and entering employment."

For Immediate Release. No 57/97 Tues 11 February 1997

MP PLEDGES ACTION ON FUNDING CRISIS IN FE

The Further Education Funding Council has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that it is up to the management of Nelson and Colne College to deal with the crisis which has engulfed it. Last month the College provoked a storm of protest when it unveiled plans to make 37 posts redundant and leave unfilled 10 vacancies.

The Chief Executive of the FEFC told the MP: "Individual college corporations must consider how they will best meet required

efficiency gains. A review of the staffing needs of Nelson and Colne College which takes account of student recruitment and the changing requirements of curriculum delivery may well form part of that consideration. The Council does not have a specific role in advising colleges on their management processes." The MP says the reply leaves the college "twisting in the wind".

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP pledged to renew his efforts to secure a debate on FE funding. He said: "The FEFC has got to work within the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and in the light of guidance issued by the Education and Employment Secretary but, quite frankly, it is astonishing that the FEFC can take this laid back attitude. The priorities in its annual report include *"monitoring the financial health of the sector and of individual colleges and advising colleges on their financial planning and financial control systems" (page 94).* I want to know what kind of advice they have given my local college."

"I am told by the FEFC that my own college is being put through the mangle because *"it has not yet had to make the kind of "efficiency gains" as many other colleges in the region".* The entire college is being dislocated and its reputation jeopardised for the want of these bizarre "efficiency gains". It is stretching things to

expect the lay person to believe the college can function as well as ever with the loss of 37 posts and the 10 unfilled vacancies."

The MP concluded: "An incoming Labour Government is pledged to use the windfall levy to get 250,000 young people into work, education and training. Clearly, FE Colleges such as Nelson and Colne will have a role to play. We are also pledged to review the funding methodology operated by the FEFC. The existing system plainly does not work. We also intend to look at the composition of boards of governors of FE colleges. We intend to alter the rules of college government to ensure there is mandatory and balanced representation from staff, students and the local community."

Note to Editors: The following letter from the Chief Executive of the Further Education Funding Council, Professor David Melville, dated 7 February, was sent to the Pendle MP in response to his earlier one of 27 January: "Thank you for your letter of 27 January 1997 about proposed redundancies at Nelson and

Colne College. The Council understands the pressures faced by colleges as a result of the need for continued efficiency gains implied in the annual Public Expenditure Settlement (PES). It is aware of the considerable effort and determination of all those involved in delivering further education to ensure that, in spite of these pressures, the needs of students are met.

Nelson and Colne College is one of the lowest funded colleges in the North West region as measured by the average level of funding (ALF) per unit of activity. As a result, the college has not yet had to make the same level of efficiency gains as many other colleges in the region. Its funded ALF for 1996/7 is, at £16.16, more than 10 per cent below the regional median. The efficiency gain for the college in the current year, implied by the December 1995 PES settlement, is 5.3 per cent compared with the sector average of 5.8%.

Individual college corporations must consider how they will best meet required efficiency gains. A review of the staffing needs of Nelson and Colne College which takes account of student recruitment and the changing requirements of curriculum delivery may well form part of that consideration. The Council does not have a specific role in advising colleges on their management processes."

Note 2 to Editors: The National Audit Office report on the FEFC for England, just published, says that *"colleges collectively are incurring deficits and their financial position has worsened since incorporation: 280 out of 452 colleges were in deficit in 1995-6 compared with 214 colleges in 1993-4."*

For Immediate Release. No 58/97 Mon 6 January 1997

A LEVEL PLAN GETS POOR MARKS FROM MP

The Government's plans for broadening 'A' levels and reducing the number of exam boards are, as usual, too little too late says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "For six years now Labour has been calling for reform of the 'A' level system to match international competition and answer the needs of employers. Every time the subject has come up the Tories have rubbished our plans and blustered about the 'A' level "gold standard." Now, after six years of dithering, they have conceded that reform is needed."

"Their plans come far too late for thousands of British schoolchildren who have left school without adequate qualifications. Britain has a smaller share of 17 and 18 year-olds in full-time education than any other OECD country except Turkey, and by the age of 18 - even after the recent expansion in numbers - fewer than two in five young people are in full-time education."

"Labour's goal is to broaden 'A' level study, through the addition of key skills and the development of a flexible qualifications framework that allows a greater combination of academic and vocational options. And we will examine whether we should move towards a single exam board for England so that parents, employers and universities know that a particular grade gained in one school is as good as a similar grade gained in another."

For Immediate Release. No 59/97 Wed 12 February 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS UP AGAIN

The number of people out of work in Pendle and claiming the Jobseeker's Allowance rose last month to 1,842 - up 151 from the December figure. It takes the jobless total above the benchmark 1,708 which the Prime Minister inherited when he entered Downing Street in November 1990.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "In the 75 months since John Major became Prime Minister the unemployment total for Pendle has been below the figure he inherited from Margaret Thatcher on only two occasions - in December and November last year. Now it is up again."

"I was very pleased to have been invited to a very thought provoking service last Sunday at Colne's Trinity Baptist Church to mark "Unemployment Sunday". It is perfectly clear to me that long periods without work can destroy a person's sense of self worth and self esteem. Full employment should be at the very centre of economic policy making."

The MP added: "The best form of social security is a job."

Note to Editors: Male unemployment in January was 1,455 (6.7%) and female 387 (2.8%). There were 350 unfilled vacancies at the Nelson JobCentre and 156 at Colne.

The cost to the national exchequer of unemployment in Pendle since John Major became PM is £146,094,750. (calculated in line with the Treasury practice at £9,000 per claimant in terms of benefit and lost taxes).

For Immediate Release. No 60/97 Tues 12 February 1997

LABOUR GETS DEBATE ON CRISIS IN FE

The Labour MP for Hyndburn, Greg Pope, has secured a special debate on the crisis in Further Education. It will take place next Wednesday morning (19 February).

His East Lancashire colleague, Gordon Prentice, explained: "This is splendid news. With his background and deep understanding of education, Greg is well placed to address the pressing issues confronting the sector."

"We have been kicking up a tremendous fuss to get Ministers to face up to the gravity of what is happening all over the country as FE colleges move into deficit."

"I hope to catch the Speaker's eye. The crisis at Nelson and Colne College is very real to the staff, students and to the wider community."

For Immediate Release. No 61/97. Thurs 13 February 1997

LABOUR GOES FOR THE JUGULAR IN BSE DEBATE

Labour is preparing a new attack on the government over its handling of the BSE crisis says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP - a member of the Agriculture Select Committee - said: "Ever since this crisis began, we have been calling, along with the NFU, for decisive action to save our beef industry. Next Monday the Commons will vote on a motion of censure of agriculture minister Douglas Hogg.
Hogg is one of the most spectacularly incompetent ministers in recent memory. He has done massive damage to our beef industry, harmed our relations with Europe, wasted £3.3 billion

of taxpayers' money - and still failed to end the crisis. We have had a bellyful of lies and bungling."

Note to Editors: The story so far:

20 March: Latest BSE crisis breaks. Hogg tells Commons. "I do not believe that this information should damage consumer confidence and thus the beef market."
Late March-April: Consumer confidence and beef sales collapse. EU imposes export ban on British beef products. Major declares "beef war" and policy of non-co-operation with Europe.
June: Government gives in to EU at Florence summit and agrees to a selective cull. Major predicts that cull will be carried out and the ban lifted by November.
September: More swill from Hogg on the basis of "new" scientific evidence, government backs out of Florence agreement and refuses to re-start selective slaughter programme.
December: Government agrees to the Florence agreement - again. Still no end to ban.
February: Hogg boasts that £3.3 billion cost of crisis is equivalent to 2p on income tax.

For Immediate Release. No 62/97 Mon 17 February 1997

MP WRECKS "ONE DAY SALE"

The Torquay based organisers of a one day sale held in the Marsden Community Centre in Nelson last night were forced to abandon the event after the intervention of Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice and four local Labour councillors.

Dozens of people turned up for the 7pm sale, tempted by offers of Hitachi TVs and other expensive electrical goods at knock down prices. A 2 inch Casio television was advertised at £10.

Speaking from outside the locked doors of the community centre, the MP told people to be on their guard. He said the organisers - Table Top Sales - were just like Table Top Marketing who came to the Great Marsden Hotel in October 1995 and ripped people off, "selling shoddy goods for inflated prices."

Ten minutes after the sale started, it was abandoned. Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "The people I saw tonight who were running this thing were not honest traders trying to make an honest shilling. They are out to trick, con and deceive. They are

cheats and fraudsters, preying on good honest people who think they are on to a bargain."

"They are also cowards. The heavily overweight organiser with fingers like sausages refused to give me his name when I challenged him. He then resorted to abuse. I also saw with my own eyes the way in which people were corralled together and told not to make a noise - otherwise they would be asked to leave. The audience was seeded with stooges who were there to "buy" the expensive stuff for next to nothing while genuine buyers would have got rubbish."

MP WRECKS "ONE DAY SALE"

"I shall again be calling for a tightening up of the law. The last time I raised this in Parliament, Government Ministers told me there was nothing more they could do and people just had to be on their guard. That is simply not good enough."

"I shall be contacting the Trading Standards people in Torquay to get them to check up on Table Top Sales."

"Councillors Fred Hartley, Gary Rowlands, Martin Short and Colin Waite who were there alongside me were absolutely splendid. They are a credit to the area."

The MP added: "The people who run Table Top Sales are the lowest form of pond life."

For Immediate Release. No 63/97 Tues 18 February 1997

COST OF BSE 'INCALCULABLE' SAYS PRENTICE

The spectre of millions of cases of new variant CJD was held out as a possibility by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, speaking in last night's Commons debate on BSE. He told the House that BSE and CJD have long incubation periods and it was impossible to know if we were out of the woods yet.

The MP was quoting Steven Dealer - a medical microbiologist at Burnley General Hospital - who has speculated that CJD could hit up to 35 million people. No-one knows.

The MP said: "There are 14 or 15 cases of new variant CJD and we all pray that is the end of it. But the next couple of years will be crucial given the incubation period of the disease."

The MP told the House: "Conservative members talk about the cost. Yes, the BSE blunder has cost us £3.5 billion, but in terms of the health of the nation, the cost is incalculable. Beef is safe only if the controls are in place and working."

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "I am sure all the controls are now being rigorously enforced but that was not always the case. Contaminated feed could be held legally on farms until as late as August of last year. Slaughterhouse controls were not watertight until last year. And the number of authorised meat inspectors was slashed from 1,026 in 1990 to 677 in 1995."

"The Conservatives have given us salmonella, listeria, e coli and, crowning it all, the disaster of BSE. They make me sick."

For Immediate Release. No 64/97 WED 19 February 1997

MP ACCUSES MINISTER OF TURNING HIS BACK ON COLLEGE CRISIS

Education Minister James Paice was today accused by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, of turning his back on the crisis that has engulfed Nelson and Colne College which last month announced 37 redundancies.

The MP, who was speaking in a special adjournment debate on Further Education secured by his East Lancashire Labour neighbour, Greg Pope, MP for Hyndburn.

The MP said the job losses would have a devastating impact on a college which has Investor in People status and won a Charter Mark in 1993. He quoted from the Further Education Funding Council inspection report, published in August last year, which set out the strengths of the college.

The MP said: "There was no inking in that report that a crisis was just around the corner. And it beggars belief that things will continue as they are if the jobs are lost. The quality and scope of the education on offer must surely be affected."

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "Everyone is passing the parcel on this one. The Minister says it is nothing to do with him. The Funding Council say it is up to the college to sort things out. The

college blames the funding mechanisms. I blame the Government."

Embargo 10am Tues 18 February 1997. No 65/97

MP DUBS ONE DAY SALESMAN A "CHEAT"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today described Mr Terry Green, who ran a one day sale at the Marsden Community Centre on Sunday evening, as a fraudster and cheat.

Speaking from Westminster the MP said: "These 'one day sales' are the biggest rip off imaginable. People like Green are cheats who should be run out of town. We had Stephen Beach's sale at the Great Marsden Hotel in October 1995 and then Steve Johnson's one in Barnoldswick. I hope the Marsden one - which we successfully torpedoed - will be the last." The MP added: "A new Labour Government will protect people from these rogues."

Note to Editors: Gordon Prentice MP supported by Peter Pike MP and others tabled the following EDM which will appear on the Order Paper today: "That this House believes the law regulating one day sales is totally inadequate in that it provides no proper protection for the public who can be persuaded by trickery, deceit and sometimes intimidation to pay good money for worthless rubbish and that the goods are often handed over in taped black bin liners with instructions that they should not be opened while the sale is in progress; notes that on Sunday evening, 16 February, at the Marsden Community Centre, Nelson, a Mr Terry Green of Table Top Sales of Abbey Court, Abbey Road, Torquay physically threatened and verbally abused the hon Member for Pendle who turned up to warn constituents of the dangers of one day sales; congratulates councillors Fred Hartley, Gary Rowland, Martin Short and Colin Waite for their stout support for the hon Member and the local community; applauds the good sense of the people in Marsden Ward who gave absolutely no support or encouragement to the cheat and fraudster Terry Green and notes Mr Green was forced to abandon the sale after nine minutes having sold four video tapes for £2 and some radios for 50p but before the expensive, branded goods such as Hitachi and Casio TVs were offered up and "sold" to accomplices; and calls on the Government to take urgent action to protect the public from loathsome and despicable cheats such as Mr Green who prey on honest people who think they may be on to the bargain of a lifetime.

For Immediate Release. No 66/97 Tues 18 February 1997

ELDERLY TO BENEFIT FROM THE FEEL-GOOD FACTOR

An NHS Recuperation Service for the elderly will be set up by an incoming Labour Government according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "Government policies have created a lack of NHS recuperative care beds, so that elderly patients are often discharged too early or kept in acute care, blocking 9,000 beds at any given time. And when elderly patients are discharged too early, too many of them end up back in hospital - 57,000 elderly people were re-admitted in 1994/95."

"Labour's scheme will provide nursing care for older patients ready to leave an acute ward but not strong enough to go home. The service, led by nurses, will not be a substitute for long-term care but will provide a short period when elderly patients have time to regain strength and confidence before returning home."

"Money saved from NHS bureaucracy will pay for start-up costs of the scheme. It is an example of our pledge to cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step, by releasing £100 million saved from NHS red tape."

The MP added: "The plight of elderly patients is an example of the Tory market-driven NHS at its worst. Our proposals for a recuperation service will provide a high-quality supportive environment to aid recovery."

For Immediate Release. No 67/97 Wed 19 February 1997

MP SLAMS RAIL PRIVATISATION GRAVY TRAIN

The Tory rail privatisation gravy train keeps rolling, with new scandals of mismanagement and private profit at public expense says local MP Gordon Prentice.

- Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The sale of leasing company Eversholt today will net an estimated £20 million for managing director Andrew Jukes - an 18,000 per cent return on the £110,000 he invested at the company's privatisation a year

ago. Other senior directors will make £10 million each on investments of less than £80,000. Eversholt will today fetch over 50 per cent more than the Tories sold it for."

- The MP added: "A survey by Save Our Railways shows that dozens of stations and routes are becoming dangerously run-down as a result of Railtrack's greed. The privatised track operator has underspent its maintenance budget by £750,000 - but its latest profits are up 77 per cent. Overall investment has fallen by over a third, from over £1.5 billion in the last year of British Rail (1992/93) to £933 million In 1995/96."

The MP mused: "I wonder if the Pendle Conservative Association believes it is right to sell public assets at prices low enough for investors to get an 18,000 per cent a year return on their investment."

For Immediate Release. No 68/97 Wed 19 February 1997

LEAR CORP TO STAY IN COLNE BUT SOME JOBS TO GO

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today confirmed that he had quizzed Lear Corporation Managing Director, Peter Berry, about the long-term future of the plant at Colne and about possible job losses when he visited the site last Friday, 14 February.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today following renewed speculation, this time about possible job losses, the MP said: "When I visited Lear on Friday I wanted to get a cast iron assurance that the plant would **not** close. There had been extensive speculation about this in the local press. I put the point to the Managing Director quite bluntly. Peter Berry pledged the Colne plant would **not** close and said that, on the contrary, there would be a major revamping of the Riverside and Green Road sites and, in the longer term, the demolition of the old Spring Gardens Mill."

"I am obviously concerned that some jobs are proposed to be transferred to the Midlands but there is no secret about that. Mr Berry explicitly acknowledged that to be the case in a letter to me last month which I copied to the Press on 20 January."

"Mr Berry told me that over the next two years some jobs would be transferred to be closer to the car plants. The company would be seeking volunteers and going for early retirement and natural

wastage. And, clearly, they will be discussing things with the trade union - the GMB."

"I am keeping my fingers crossed that the numbers can be kept to an absolute minimum and that we get some jobs coming back here. That was stated as *more follows*

LEAR CORP TO STAY IN COLNE BUT SOME JOBS TO GO

a real possibility in the letter I received from Mr Berry last month. A lot can happen in two years."

"In the next two months I want to see a new Government elected which will promote and encourage manufacturing investment here in Pendle. That is what we need more than anything else."

Note to Editors: The MP told the press on 20 January (Press release 25/97) that the Lear Corporation had no plans to close the Colne Plant. The Press Release stated:

> Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has been told by Roger Berry, the MD of the Lear Corporation's plant at Spring Gardens Mill in Colne, that the company "has no plans to close the Colne operation."
>
> The MP wrote to the company in the wake of the recent press speculation that the company might be transferring production to its other plant at Tipton near Coventry.
>
> Mr Berry told the MP: "Our company is a major supplier to the UK automotive industry and we are constantly under pressure to supply products from factories in close proximity to the automotive manufacturers. This has led to the establishment of a factory In Tipton in the West Midlands three years ago to serve Rover, Jaguar and Toyota."
>
> He continued: "We are constantly under cost pressures and need to ensure that we have extremely efficient operations. This leads to a continual review of the way in which we conduct our business and currently we are continuing this process. We have not yet finalised our strategy for the period ahead but we have no plans to close the Colne operation. There could be some transfer of products from Colne to Tipton, and indeed vice versa, but we have some key processes

at the Colne plant and we have not envisaged a withdrawal from that location."

The MP said: "This is reassuring. I shall be visiting the plant soon to hear the company's thinking. Clearly, we need to keep all the manufacturing jobs we can. We have had so many closures over recent years another major one just doesn't bear thinking about."

For Immediate Release. No 69/97 Mon 24 February 1997

PRIVATISED UTILITIES HAVE GOT AWAY WITH "BLUE MURDER" SAYS PRENTICE

The privatised utilities in Pendle have got away with blue murder says local MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking in Barnoldswick at the weekend, the MP said: "We've seen them rake in massive profits at a time when the service we are getting is deteriorating. An incoming Labour Government will change the law to make sure the consumer comes first."

The Pendle MP made the pledge as he released new official figures compiled by the House of Commons Library showing that since privatisation local utility companies have made a fortune. The MP said: "Since privatisation, Norweb's pre-tax profits have gone up 34.8% (£59m) and directors' pay has gone up a whopping 58.8%. North West Water has lost a third of its employees since privatisation with pre-tax profits up 20%. Directors' pay is up 56% and complaints up 81% to 14,501."

"Yorkshire Electricity has lost 40% of its workforce since privatisation. Profits are up 39% to £61m. Directors remuneration is up 11.1%. Drought hit Yorkshire Water has seen a cut of 6.5% in its workforce - down 300. Its annual pre-tax profits are up 22% and the increase in directors remuneration since privatisation is a staggering 72.4%."

The MP said: "Compared to the year in which they were privatised, the electricity gas and water industries between them now employ 42,000 fewer people; make nearly £600m extra in profits every year; pay their directors nearly £9m more each year; and are the cause of over 90,000 extra complaints each year."

More follows

PRIVATISED UTILITIES HAVE GOT AWAY
WITH "BLUE MURDER" SAYS PRENTICE

"People in Pendle are worse off because of the weak and ineffective way that the Tories have regulated the privatised utilities. And at the moment, Tory regulation means that consumer protection is only a 'secondary duty ' of the energy regulators. An incoming Labour Government will change the law to make the consumer come first."

The MP added: "If the Tories are re-elected at the next general election we will see more of the same - worsening standards service as jobs and investment are cut back to pay for excess profits and fat cat pay awards."

For Immediate Release. No 70/97 Mon 24 February 1997

MP SLAMS TORY RECORD ON SOCIAL SECURITY

The Tories have failed on the welfare state: the cost to the public purse is up - and life for those on benefit is harder. This was the message local MP, Gordon Prentice, gave to the Annual Meeting of the Barrowford Labour Party at the weekend.

The MP said: "The Government says it doesn't want people to depend on benefit - but the number of people dependent on benefits has doubled under the Tories. Astonishingly, 1 in 5 non-pensioner households in Britain now has no-one in work."

"This is one of the highest rates in the industrialised world - higher than France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the USA. Canada and Australia."

The MP continued: "The Government says it wants to cut spending on social security. But Ministers have increased it - £1 in every £3 of Government spending is now spent social security compared to £1 in every £5 in 1979."

"Since Peter Lilley became Secretary of State in 1992. spending on Social Security has increased by £15bn over and above inflation - from £77bn to over £92bn in real terms - an increase of 20%."

"The Tories claim this is due to more spending on the elderly and the sick and disabled. This is not true. The increase in spending on pensions accounts for only £1.6bn and the increase in

spending on the sick and disabled accounts for only £4.3bn since 1991 /2."

"The explosion of spending on social security is because of benefits to pay for Tory social and economic failure."
more follows

MP SLAMS TORY RECORD ON SOCIAL SECURITY

"An extra £8.2bn a year is now spent on benefits like Income Support, Unemployment Benefit and Housing Benefit compared with 1991/2 That's the equivalent of an extra 4p on the basic rate of income tax. Every taxpayer now pays £1,275 a year for benefits related to Tory social and economic failure, compared with £950 a year in 1991/92."

The MP concluded: "The best way to cut the Social Security bill is not to make people on benefits poorer as the Conservatives do - but to help get them off benefit and into work."

ends

Note to Editors: An incoming Labour Government would help:

* the young unemployed by getting 250,000 under 25s off benefit and into work by using money from the windfall levy on the excess unfair profits of the privatised utilities. Every young person unemployed for more than 6 months will be offered a job or training under our rights and responsibilities plan. For those unemployed less than 6 months we will apply benefit rules flexibly so that wherever possible, young people can do voluntary work to improve their skills.

* the Long Term Unemployed by introducing a £75 a week national insurance holiday for employers who take on people unemployed for more than 2 years. We will relax the 16 hour rule to encourage the improvement of skills and education. We will pilot the use of benefit transfers to offer the unemployed different routes into work and training

* Lone Mothers by inviting those lone mothers whose youngest child is in the second term of full time education into the Job Centre for help with job search and information on training and childcare. We will have a National Childcare Strategy. including a network of after school clubs to help mothers match work hours with school hours. We will improve the skills and training of lone

mother with our individual Learning Accounts and targets for TECs to train lone mothers. We will develop a flexible benefit system to help reduce disincentives to work for lone mothers

For Immediate Release. No 71/97 Mon 24 February 1997

US POWER GIANT BIDS FOR YORKSHIRE ELECTRICITY

A US power company, American Electric Power, is to bid £1.4 billion for Yorkshire Electricity according to reports in the Sunday Telegraph. The Board of Directors is recommending shareholders accept. If the bid succeeds Southern Electric would be left as the only independent regional electricity company out of the 12 which were privatised in 1990.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, part of whose Pendle constituency is served by the company, commented: "The idea that Yorkshire Electricity is being taken over by an American company saddens me. My preference is for a local company supplying the local area, responsive to local concerns and needs."

The MP added: "The threat of a windfall tax by an incoming Labour Government clearly didn't deter the Americans. The water and electricity utilities are awash with cash with profits of £14.2 billion since privatisation."

"The Government doesn't mind our industries being flogged off to overseas buyers. Any Government that could sell the Ministry of Defence married quarters estate to a Japanese Bank is hardly likely to blanch at the thought of Yorkshire going American."

Note to Editors: Other regional electricity companies that have been taken over by American companies include Northern, East Midlands, South Western, London, Seeboard and Midlands. Since 1990 there has been a takeover frenzy. Manweb was taken over by ScottishPower. Eastern went to Hanson. Norweb disappeared into the arms of North West Water for £1.8 billion. Swalec was taken over by Welsh Water.

For Immediate Release. No 72/97 Tues 25 February 1997

THE TUBE WILL GO DOWN THE TUBE warns MP

Even senior Conservatives secretly realise how risky London tube privatisation would be says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: A leaked letter from Transport Secretary George Young to the Prime Minister earlier this month revealed that the government might make as little as £600 million from the sale - even though the tube is worth up to £13 billion. It would mean more of the waste and chaos we have seen in the privatised railways."

The MP said: "Tube privatisation offers London a poor deal and the rest of the country nothing. Tube privatisation would sell public assets cheap and delay investment further. It would be a poor deal for taxpayers."

Tony Blair has said of Labour's plans for the tube: "There is scope to bring in private sector capital and skills. Labour's approach would provide an improved service for the underground's users and give better value for money for the taxpayer. It would offer Londoners a new way between the status quo and dogmatic wholesale privatisation."

The MP added: "This Government has given away public assets for next to nothing. The railway network went under the hammer for £1.9 billion when its replacement value was over £19 billion. And £1.2 billion of loans were simply written off to give the new private sector owner a chance to start with a clean sheet of paper. The underground will go for a song as well."

For Immediate Release. No 73/97 Tues 25 February 1997

MP SLAMS NURSERY VOUCHER "WASTE"

The Government will be sending out thousands of nursery vouchers today - the latest stage of one of their silliest and most wasteful pet schemes says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The scheme, he says, is already a flop.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Parents will receive a voucher, but no guarantee of a place for their four year-old. The pilot scheme has failed to stimulate expansion of places. Tory Wandsworth actually had 38 fewer places for four year olds in the second term of the pilot than in the first term! What parents in Pendle need for their children is a nursery place - not a voucher."

“Parents have less choice under the voucher scheme than before. Government figures show a 75 per cent reduction in the number of four year-olds in the private and voluntary sector in term two of the pilot phase.

“The scheme is enormously wasteful: £3 million has been or will be spent on advertising the scheme, and £20 million will be spent on bureaucracy when it goes nation-wide. The reality is that the government has undermined nursery expansion through repeated cuts in local authority budgets. As a result Britain has the lowest level of publicly funded services for young children in Europe and the wider industrialised world.”

“We will use money being wasted on vouchers to guarantee every four year-old a year's pre-school education, and to target provision for all three year-olds. Our plans for nursery provision form part of our programme to help children in the early years.”

For Immediate Release. No 74/97 Wed 26 February 1997

MP CALLS FOR ANSWERS ON GULF WAR SYNDROME

Armed Forces Minister Nicholas Soames is embroiled in new allegations of a cover-up over Gulf war syndrome, the mystery illnesses afflicting thousands of veterans according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said today: “In common with MPs all over the country I had many young constituents serve in the military during the Gulf War. Some of them are in very poor health today as a result. In December, Soames was forced to admit that he had misled the Commons over the use in the Gulf War of organo-phospate chemicals, suspected as a cause of the illnesses. Now a report into the affair suggests that the Ministry of Defence knew months earlier that the information on use of the chemicals was wrong.”

The MP continued: “The report blames civil servants for withholding the information. But the signs of a cover-up are clear. And, despite the fact that in December Soames promised to keep the House “closely informed," he is today making no statement to the House on the report.”

Labour shadow defence secretary David Clark added: "Nicholas Soames has shown breathtaking negligence, complacency and incompetence. He is trying to pass the buck to civil servants for his own inaction and failure to heed warnings. This is the

Government's latest BSE scandal - Blame Someone Else. Soames must come to the House to make a fully public and accountable oral statement on how he repeatedly misled MPs and Gulf War veterans on the extent that organo-phosphate pesticides were used by British troops in the Gulf War."

For Immediate Release. No 75/97 Wed 26 February 1997

"JOB DESTROYING" SOCIAL CHAPTER IS A MYTH

A leading independent think-tank has ridiculed the Government's claims that the social chapter would cost jobs says Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice. The Employment Policy Institute says that there is no evidence that membership of the social chapter would cost jobs, and that the Government's claims are "overblown, inaccurate and unresearched."

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "I've always known the Government's parrot cry about the Social Chapter costing jobs was pure, unadulterated rubbish. Nevertheless, it is satisfying to hear the highly respected Employment Policy Institute speaking out in this way. The real question for Pendle's Conservatives to answer is whether they back British withdrawal from the EU at a cost of 3.5 million jobs."

"Pendle is a low wage area with increasing job insecurity. My constituents need another dose of Conservatism as much as a dose of anthrax" said the MP.

For Immediate Release. No 76/97 Wed 26 February 1997

8,663 COUNCIL TAX PAYERS IN PENDLE PAY MORE THAN A MAYFAIR MILLIONAIRE says PRENTICE

"The Government is forcing 8,663 households in Pendle to pay more Council Tax than millionaires living in mansions in Belgravia and Mayfair" says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

"Council Tax Band H covers properties worth £320,000 or more. There are 11,385 Band H houses in Westminster, but this year Band H Council Tax payers in Westminster have had to pay just £590.20 each."

"This means that 8,663 hard-working and hard-up families here in Pendle pay more so that the millionaires living in mansion areas in Westminster, including Mayfair and Belgravia, pay less.

The most the richest millionaire living in the biggest mansion in Mayfair can possibly be asked to pay in Council Tax this year is just £590.20. They should rename Westminster Council and call it Westminster Five-Nine-O."

The MP added: "There are no fewer than 8,663 households in Pendle forced by the Conservatives to pay more than £590.20p in Council Tax. That's 23.8% of all Pendle Council Tax payers hit by the Westminster Five-Nine-O scandal. The whole system is a racket. If Pendle Council got the same help from the Government as Tory Westminster they wouldn't have to pay any Council Tax at all next year. They could actually pay out a rebate to every Council Taxpayer of £542. An incoming Labour Government will put a stop to this racket once and far all."

For Immediate Release. No 77/97 Thurs 27 February 1997

PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP on Friday, 28 February.

at 10.30am at Ashiana Lodge, Audley Close, Nelson. Gordon Prentice MP will be dropping in to say hello to the Warden, Diana Wearden, Staff and Residents and to answer any questions they may have.

at 11.30am at West Street Primary School, Colne. The MP will be visiting West Street Primary School for a short meeting with the Head, Lionel Howarth. He will be hearing from teachers (and children) on what they think about the state of education in Britain today.

at 8pm in Silverman Hall, Nelson. The MP will be addressing a meeting on the crisis at Nelson and Colne College.

MP GOES TO POT! at 8.45pm at the Alexandria Snooker Club, Holme Street, Nelson. This time Gordon will be taking on Roy Colton and others at a charity snooker match to raise funds for a new disabled access at the Labour Party HQ in Nelson. The MP once defeated Hurricane Higgins so watch out!

For Immediate Release. No 78/97 Thurs 27 February 1997

"READ ALL ABOUT IT!" SAYS PRENTICE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today backed Labour's new strategy to ensure that every child leaving primary school reaches their expected reading age.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: “The Government’s policies to benefit the few not the many have created a crisis in basic skills, Last year nearly half of 11 year-olds failed to reach their expected reading age. An OECD study, which the Government is refusing to publish before the election, shows nearly half of British adults have difficulty understanding a bus timetable.”

“Under the Tories there is enormous inconsistency in results between similar schools. Even among schools in better-off areas, where fewer than five per cent of pupils receive free school meals, the number of children achieving Level 4 ranges between all children in some schools to as low as just one in five in others.”

The MP continued: “We want to get children reading to learn and for fun. We will cut class sizes to 30 or under for all five, six and seven year-olds, using money saved from the assisted places scheme. We will set a new interim target of 80% of children leaving primary school with their expected reading age by the year 2001, with an ultimate target of 100% by 2006.”

The MP added: “It is unacceptable for nearly half of 11 year-olds to be behind in their reading. Why do the Tories want to send a tiny minority of children to private schools in the assisted places scheme rather than improving standards for all our children?"

For Immediate Release. No 79/97 Thurs 27 February 1997

THE GRAVY TRAIN IS STILL ROLLING SAYS MP

In the week Ministers announced their plans to privatise the London Underground, and days after South West Trains' cancellation of hundreds of trains, the Tory privatisation gravy train is rolling again says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP said: “The Tories claimed the "success" of rail privatisation offered justification for their plans for the Tube - but the reality demonstrated by MTL's plans for its two rail franchises is very different. Leaked documents show that the private operator is planning to shed 1,200 jobs 40 per cent of its

workforce - at Regional Railways North East - which serves Burnley - and Merseyrail Electrics.

This is the first documentary evidence of job cuts by a rail operator - and comes just two weeks after MTL were given the franchise. The result will be more of the unreliable, shabby service seen on other privatised rail services.

The Pendle MP's colleague, shadow transport secretary Andrew Smith said: "The reports this morning serve as another stark reminder that under the Tories, regional rail and tube services and their passengers can only suffer further. Labour will not stand for any repeat of the South West Trains fiasco."

Embargoed **9am Fri 28 Feb No 80/97 Thurs 27 Feb 1997**

MP CALLS FOR DEBATE ON THREATS TO BOOKSHOPS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has called for an early Commons debate on the conduct of Neil Hamilton, the former Deregulation Minister who resigned amid allegations of sleaze and corruption.

The MP pressed the Government's business manager, Tony Newton, to make time for a debate on the actions of the Tatton MP in threatening bookshops with legal action if they choose to stock the book "Sleaze: the Corruption of Parliament" which documents Hamilton's activities. Newton said he deplored the actions of the Pendle MP in raising the issue in the way he had done.

Speaking after the Commons exchange, Prentice said: "I knew that Neil Hamilton had been badgering bookshops in his Tatton constituency but you could have knocked me over with a feather when the bookshop I go to in Victoria told me they had cleared the shelves of "Sleaze" after hearing from Hamilton's solicitor."

Note to Editors: The following Early Day Motion will appear on the Order Paper tomorrow Friday 28 February in the name of the hon Member for Pendle: **Conduct of the hon Member for Tatton and book shops:** "This House regrets that the hon Member for Tatton, a former Vice Chairman of the Small Business Bureau, who lists bibliomania as a special interest, has instructed his solicitor to threaten legal action against Books *etc.* in Victoria Street and other bookshops in Westminster, in his Tatton constituency and, indeed, nationwide if they stock "Sleaze: the Corruption of Parliament"; believes there is enormous demand

for this book and considers that in the interests of freedom of information, the hon Member should refrain from threats of legal action against the book trade and sue, if he is so minded, the publishers and the Guardian newspaper, and further believes readers should be given the chance to make up their own minds about the hon Gentleman's conduct and applauds the decision of Politicos bookshop in Victoria to stock the book."

For Immediate Release. No 81/97 Tues 4 March 1997

MP DISMISSES TORY POSTER CAMPAIGN

Today sees the launch of yet another new Tory poster campaign - in even more negative spirit than the failed "British lion" posters says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The Tories are panicking in the wake of their disastrous Wirral defeat - because the real state of Britain isn't getting any better and voters know it."

"The Government is divided on tactics. Brian Mawhinney and Central Office are pushing a relentlessly negative campaign, underwritten with shady foreign cash donations. They are claiming again that Labour's proposals would mean increased spending - even though we have said precisely where the money is coming from to pay for our pledges. The Conservatives' negative campaign will fail - as every single previous re-launch over the last year has failed."

"But Kenneth Clarke's approach - to claim that everything is going fine - is equally doomed because it simply flies in the face of reality. And the government has still failed to paper over the gaping divisions in the Tory party on Europe and the single currency. In the last ten days, Malcolm Rifkind, Kenneth Clarke, Steven Dorrell and John Major himself have all embraced conflicting positions. Dorrell's explanation for completely contradicting "agreed" policy on the single currency? *"My thought processes were blurred at that particular moment."* What an astonishing admission from one of the Conservative Party's putative leaders in waiting."

"We are all fed up with silly posters and the same the old lies."

For Immediate Release. No 82/97 Tues 4 March 1997

PRENTICE GREETS WIRRAL VICTOR

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, told a packed meeting of Labour MPs at Westminster this evening that the result in Wirral South last week was an inspiration to the entire Labour Party and just the boost that was needed in the run up to the General Election.

The Pendle MP who chairs the Parliamentary Labour Party's North West Group of MPs - the biggest regional grouping - was welcoming its newest member, Ben Chapman.

Prentice said: "Ben thanked everyone for the help and support he got from us all during the campaign and we thanked him for winning! When Ben took his seat in the Commons this afternoon, the Conservatives looked very crestfallen indeed. They know their time is up."

"The Prime Minister said Ben shouldn't unpack his bags. I think after Wirral it is John Major should be packing his bags!"

For Immediate Release. No 83/97 Wed 5 March 1997

MP DERIDES "PENSIONS STUNT"

The Tories have launched their biggest fifth term policy stunt to date - and this time ordinary families' pensions are in the firing line according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says the Tories' "basic pension plus" scheme is deeply flawed.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The Conservatives are abolishing the basic state pension for future generations, creating insecurity in retirement for present-day young people. And they admit that taxes will be up for the next 40 years! They say the plan will cost £160 million every year - or £1 billion over 3 years, rising to £7 billion a year by 2040. The proposals will only affect people joining the workforce now - people who will retire from about 2040 onwards. So there won't be any savings until after 2040. And between now and 2040, employees will have to pay twice - once to pay benefits to pensioners still relying on the basic state pension, and again to pay contributions into the personal funds of the new generation."

"This is another gamble by the Conservatives. The scandal over mis-selling of private pensions shows the failure of Tory policies for private pensions. If private pensions go wrong, the taxpayer will pick up the pieces. These proposals mean all the uncertainty

of ending the state pension. They will impose huge disguised tax increases for everyone lasting well into the next century.
And they'll provide no guarantee of security in retirement."

“The basic state pension is the foundation on which all can plan for security in retirement. Labour introduced universal pensions. They must remain the foundation of pension provision.”

For Immediate Release. No 84/97 Wed 5 March 1997

TORY MP “AN ABSOLUTE DISGRACE” SAYS PRENTICE

The Tories have been shown in their true colours by Tory MP David Evans' crass remarks says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was responding to revelations in the press today concerning the Welwyn Hatfield MP’s views on women, his Labour opponent in the General Election and black people.

On women in politics Evans said: *"Women get promoted, like Virginia Bottomley, who's dead from the neck upwards, right? I mean, she has been in the cabinet simply because she's a woman."*

On his opponent, Labour PPC Melanie Johnson, he remarked: *"She's a single girl, lives with her boyfriend, three bastard children, never done a proper job."* She is in fact a school inspector.

On race, he said: *"That bloke they let out of prison the other day ... black bastard."*

Prentice observed: “David Evans incubates the most complete and nauseating compendium of prejudices imaginable. The man is a disgrace to Parliament.”

For Immediate Release. No 85/97 Thurs 6 March 1997

21% OF FAMILIES IN PENDLE HAVE NO ONE IN WORK

The number of families in Pendle with no breadwinner has soared to 5,500 according to new figures released by the area’s MP today.

In Pendle it is estimated that 21% of households of working age have no-one in employment - far higher than the claimant count figures released by the Government. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today described the figures as a shocking indictment of the way the Conservatives are failing local people.

The figures have been compiled by the House of Commons Library from the Government's Labour Force Survey and the last census. Although they are approximate it is the first time the number of workless households has been identified in Pendle. The Government's official figures count only the number of unemployed people who qualify for benefits, while these new figures measure the total number of non-pensioner households where there is no-one in employment.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "These shocking statistics reveal the true extent of unemployment in Pendle in a way the Tories fiddled figures never could. And we are all paying the price for unemployment in higher taxes, bigger social security bills and more public borrowing."

The MP added: "I want to see a nation at work and not a nation on benefit."

For Immediate Release. No 86/97 Thurs 6 March 1997

PHOTOCALL: WELFARE RIGHTS IN PENDLE.

11am on Friday 7 March at the Welfare Rights Office in Carr Road, Nelson

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and his Burnley colleague, Peter Pike MP, will be visiting Lancashire County Council's Welfare Rights Office in Carr Road, Nelson at 11am on Friday 7 March.

For Immediate Release. No 87/97 Thurs 6 March 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT MARSDEN HOME RENOVATIONS, 120 RAILWAY STREET, NELSON at 1pm on Friday 7 March 1997.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be meeting Terry Butterworth of Marsden Home Renovations - one of 150 home improvements agencies across the country. Last year, Marsden had 600 inquiries and worked on over 200 houses.

For Immediate Release. No 88/97 Thurs 6 March 1997

MP SLAMS FOOD SAFETY COVER UP

The revelation late last night that ministers ignored a crucial report on safety in abattoirs has proved yet again that the Government cannot be trusted with the safety of our food says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The report by the Hygiene Advice Team warned in December 1995 that poor hygiene in some abattoirs was increasing the risk of infection from E coli, the bacteria which has killed 20 people in Scotland. But the signs are that the Government suppressed the report because their admissions over BSE had already caused enough uproar.

Agriculture Select Committee member, Gordon Prentice, said: "It is now as plain as a pikestaff that the controls put in place to keep BSE and other diseases out of our food were not properly enforced by this government. The details in this leaked report are truly alarming."

Labour has forced Agriculture Secretary, Douglas Hogg, to make a statement to the House of Commons this afternoon on the report and its suppression. The news also comes as it emerges that research into a water parasite causing stomach upsets in the south east is threatened by Government plans to cut research.

The Labour MP added: "We have promised to establish an independent food standards agency - a watchdog which can bark and bite on behalf of the consumer."

For Immediate Release. No 89/97 Thurs 13 March 1997

MP HAILS BRIERFIELD "SIGN OF THE TIMES"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, yesterday dropped his Westminster work for the afternoon to take time out to meet students from Edge End High School. The young people were performing at the world famous Barbican Centre in London in a play highlighting the dangers of getting involved with drugs.

Speaking after the performance, the MP said: "The play has a strong and compelling message - drugs are not fun; they can be

lethal. But the play had its humorous moments. The young people played their parts with great confidence and assurance. I am proud of them all."

Note to Editors: The play "Sign of the Times" has been devised by a group of young people from Edge End High School who have been working with Director Mandy Precious on a drama piece about drugs and young people.

The group has been rehearsing since May 1996 and met twice a week after school and then two days a week at Brierfield Youth Centre during the holidays. The play is centred around the experiences of a young man, Mudassar, who turns to taking drugs. It explores the effect of drug taking on him and on his family and the attitudes of his local community.

The production hopes to raise drug awareness issues in the community and to show what can happen to young people if the make a choice to get involved with drugs.

For Immediate Release. No 90/97 Thurs 13 March 1997

COMMONS COMMITTEE DAMNS NURSERY VOUCHERS

The Government's nursery voucher scheme has been savaged by an all-party Select Committee in a report leaked last night says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The report is a terrible indictment of the Government's flagship policy. The scheme is hare brained. It is enormously wasteful, £3 million has been or will be spent on advertising the scheme, and £20 million will be spent on bureaucracy when it goes nation-wide. An incoming Labour Government will stop it in its tracks."

Note to Editors: The report says that judging from results in the pilot areas, the scheme:

- **is not creating extra nursery places.** *"evidence remains inconclusive on the likelihood of the scheme significantly expanding provision."* Tory Wandsworth actually had 38 fewer places for four year-olds in the second term of the pilot than in the first term.

- **is not increasing choice.** by hoovering children into the state sector, the scheme has hit nurseries and playgroups in the

private and voluntary sectors - *thus reducing* parental choice. Government figures show a 75 per cent reduction in the number of four year-olds in the private and voluntary sector in term two of the pilot phase.

- **is unlikely to raise standards,** *"the overall effect of the scheme was to hoover all four year olds into [primary] schools."* But such reception classes *"may not be appropriate for their educational needs"* - and some classes have over 30 four year-olds in them.

For Immediate Release. No 91/97 Thurs 13 March 1997

MP's PLEA TO PRIME MINISTER OF AZAD KASHMIR - "DON'T FORGET PAUL WELLS"

The plight of the hostage Paul Wells was highlighted at Westminster yesterday when Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, reminded the Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, that the East Lancashire man had been held captive 618 days.

The Prime Minister assured the Pendle MP that he was doing all he could to track Paul down. He said the people who were holding Paul hostage could not possibly be on the side of Kashmir because of the damage the hostage-taking had done to the cause.

The MP was speaking at a meeting of the all Party Kashmir Group to which the Prime Minister had been invited. Prentice told the Prime Minister that the future of Kashmir would be at the top of an incoming Labour Government's foreign policy in-tray.

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "Kashmir is an unresolved issue which must be addressed. There are human rights abuses there that send a shiver running down my spine. Yet the British media - with some honourable exceptions - ignores what is happening there."

"We need to get Kashmir onto the front page."

For Immediate Release. No 92/97 Wed 12 March 1997

PRIMARY SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES "FLAWED"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has hit out at the Primary School league tables, published yesterday, which he claims are flawed.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The league tables do not tell the whole story by any means. Additional resources should be going into schools in socially deprived areas where common sense tells us that children may be having difficulties. Lancashire is ninth out of 109 local education authorities in England in terms of the number of pupils who are statemented. In Lancashire no fewer than 8,472 pupils are statemented" (3.57% in Lancashire where English average is 2.8%).

"To make sense of these raw figures there needs to be a value-added element alongside the test results. Without it, the information paints only half the picture."

Note to Editors: The Conservatives now control only five out of 140 LEAS in England and Wales.

For Immediate Release. No 93/97 Thurs 13 March 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE KID'S CLUB, HOLDEN CENTRE, GISBURN ROAD, BARROWFORD at 4pm on FRIDAY 14 MARCH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting a local Kid's Club tomorrow. "Kid's Club" is a nationwide child care initiative, keeping children entertained and amused (and safe) after school hours.

Contact Mrs Farnhill

For Immediate Release. No 94/97 Tues 11 March 1997

MP SAYS SEX HARASSMENT IN NAVY IS RIFE

Armed Forces Minister, Nicholas Soames, today confirmed that Wrens will continue to go to sea but will not be allowed to go under it. The Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has been pressing Ministers to clamp down on sexual harassment at sea following reports last month that many Wrens had endured countless humiliations since being allowed to go to sea in 1990. The MP wanted to know if Wrens would be allowed to serve in submarines. The Minister said he had no plans "at present."

Speaking at Westminster, the Pendle MP said: “Seven years ago the then Navy Minister, Archie Hamilton, decreed that Wrens could go to sea but he gave the Navy only three weeks to prepare. Since then the lives of many Wrens have been blighted by mindless sexual harassment. Some have been profoundly traumatised. Last month, Lesley Morris was awarded £63,377 by a tribunal after four years of harassment culminating in attempted suicide.”

“The Chair of the Tribunal, Elaine Donnelly, said: “*I state for the record that this award should be seen as a message to all senior officers in the navy that it is unacceptable for such harassment to be tolerated.*”

The MP commented: “We are not talking about one or two isolated cases. Too many men in the senior service are behaving in a very junior way - and they are getting away with it.”

For Immediate Release. No 95/97 Friday 14 March 1997

PENDLE MP TO OPEN NORTH WEST MS AGM

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be opening the annual general meeting of the North West Multiple Sclerosis Group at the Brierfield Community Centre on Saturday, 15 March at 1.30pm.

The MP has taken a keen interest in MS. He raised the issue in a special adjournment debate in the Commons on 10 February.

The MP said: “There is much to be done to ensure fair and equal access to treatment across the UK. It is astonishing that someone with MS in the Prime Minister’s own constituency will not have access to the drug Beta Interferon because the Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authority won’t buy it on the grounds that it is too expensive.”

“I want to set up an all Party MS Group here at Westminster and I am discussing the matter with other MPs and with the Multiple Sclerosis Society. This will help keep MS in the spotlight.”

For Immediate Release. No 96/97 Wed 12 March 1997

MP PLEDGES ASSISTED PLACES SCHEME WILL GO

The assisted places scheme costs a small fortune and benefits a tiny number of young people in East Lancashire according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He pledged today that an incoming Labour Government will get rid of it and use the money to bring class sizes for five, six and seven years olds in Lancashire down below 30.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Some people suggest the assisted places scheme is the greatest thing since sliced bread for the young people of Pendle. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There are no schools participating in the assisted places scheme in Pendle, Burnley, Rossendale, Hyndburn or next door in Craven. In Ribble Valley there is Stoneyhurst College and in Blackburn, Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School and Westholme School. Since 1992, these schools have had £4m of public money for the education of just over 300 pupils each year."

"By contrast, there are 20,425 five, six and seven years olds in Lancashire being taught in one teacher classes of more than 30. That number represents a staggering 40.4% all key stage one pupils in the county. The national average is 27.5%. Labour's pledge to get class sizes down will benefit Lancashire more than most counties."

The MP added: "Education is our top priority. We want to back and support an education service delivering results for the many - not for the few. Assisted places do not assist many in Pendle. It has got to go."

Table follows

Assisted Places

Academic Year	**1992/3**	**1993/4**	**1994/5**	**1995/6**
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School. No of assisted pupils	260	261	267	270
Cost of Places	£726,000	£803,000	£832,000	£848,000

Stoneyhurst College. No of assisted pupils	35	34	37	37
Cost	£161,000	£174,000	£215,000	£215,000
Westholme School. No of assisted places	20	25	30	37
Cost	£59,000	£75,000	£98,000	£125,000
Total Cost:	£946,000	£1,052,000	£1,145,000	£1,188,000

For Immediate Release. No 97/97 Tues 11 March 1997

BUSINESS LEADERS SLAM TORIES ON EUROPE

Today's letter to the FT, signed by 23 top business leaders including Sir Peter Bonfield, chief executive of BT, and Sir Richard Evans, chief executive of British Aerospace, gives the strongest warning yet of the damage Tory squabbling is doing to British interests.

The letter states: *"We have watched with dismay the spread of extreme Euro-scepticism .... We cannot expect our proposals and criticisms to be taken seriously if we refuse to acknowledge the enormous benefits which we have gained by being part of Europe. We need to demonstrate the UK's continued commitment to Europe is not in doubt."*

- A DTI report today rubbishes the Government's scare stories on the European working time directive, which limits involuntary working hours to 48 a week, and guarantees three weeks' holiday a year. The report says that companies will find it easy to implement the directive, and that it will not be expensive or damage British competitiveness.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said today: "The Tories are not listening, because they are too busy bickering over Europe. Deselected hard-liner George Gardiner has announced that he now supports the Referendum Party, thus becoming their first MP. He and other Tories openly call for British withdrawal from the EU.

“Labour makes it crystal clear we are not pulling out of Europe and jeopardising 3.5 million jobs. But, at the same time, we want fundamental changes in the way the European Union is run.”

For Immediate Release. No 98/97 Wed 12 March 1997

MP CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO COME CLEAN ON SLAUGHTERHOUSES

The Government’s statements on slaughterhouse hygiene are not worth the paper they are written on says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says public health should be the absolute top priority and this means openness and transparency about what goes on behind the doors of the slaughterhouses.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: “Last week's revelation was that the Government failed to publish a key report of the Hygiene Advice Teams. Now further evidence has emerged that the government has not been telling the whole truth about the state of hygiene in Britain's abattoirs, putting consumers at risk.”

“Last week Douglas Hogg told the House of Commons that standards in abattoirs "were constantly improving". But a letter to food Minister Angela Browning on February 11 from Peter Comrie, general secretary of the Association of Meat Inspectors warned that *"Levels of enforcement in hygiene at present leave much to be desired ... Faecal contamination, which can lead to E. coli need to be more rigorously controlled -without delay."*

The MP continued: “In another letter dated January 19 to Johnston McNeil, chief executive of the Meat Hygiene Service, Peter Comrie warned of a "potential time bomb" of contaminated meat: *"It appears from the very many phone calls from members that, far from improving, standards of hygiene are steadily decreasing with particular reference to faecal contamination in beef."*

It also emerged that 45 meat inspectors have been disciplined and three sacked for failing to uphold standards.

more follows

MP CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO COME CLEAN ON SLAUGHTERHOUSES

The MP added: “Public concerns have to be addressed instead all we get from Ministers is buck passing.”

“This chaos is also damaging the big slaughterhouses who operate the very highest standards. They are all being tarred with the same brush.”

“For consumer confidence to be restored, bad practice will have to be ruthlessly rooted out. And the man responsible - Douglas Hogg - should be sacked.”

Note to Editors: The MP has one of the biggest abbatoirs in the North West in his constituency - Woodheads of Colne. He is on record saying the slaughterhouse operates the very highest standards.

For Immediate Release. No 99/97 Wed 12 March 1997

NO GAZUMPING IN PENDLE SAYS PRENTICE

An incoming Labour Government will tackle the problem of gazumping says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: “At the last election, John Major promised to make life easier for people in Pendle to buy their home. But the record shoes he has no answer to the problems facing housebuyers in Pendle whether house prices are rising or falling.”

“The Government has presided over the longest housing recession in the 20th century. People have had to cope with negative equity, mortgage arrears and repossessions - all of which reached record levels. Now they are proving equally incapable of dealing with the problem of gazumping which is now reappearing in parts of the UK where house prices are rising.”

“The process of buying a house is one of the most stressful things any person can encounter. And gazumping is tailor made to send blood pressure through the roof.”

The MP added: “We are proposing a new system in which a buyer or a seller who goes back on an agreement would be obliged to meet the costs the other party had incurred in progressing towards the exchange of contracts. Anyone with any comments on this proposal - or indeed any other issues relating to house purchase - should write to me and I will make sure their views are considered before we change the law.”

For Immediate Release. No 100/97 Wed 12 March 1997

MP CONDEMNS PROPOSAL TO PRIVATISE SOCIAL SERVICES

The Government will today announce plans to privatise social service provision - a move condemned by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP said: "The plans reflect the Tories dogmatic obsession with privatisation as the solution to every problem. They will mean fear and insecurity for vulnerable people and they threaten to impose a bureaucratic and unwieldy market like the one which has massively increased red tape in the NHS."

"Today co-incidently brings news of the scandal of elderly patients wrongly discharged by North and Mid Hants health authority. Who can trust a Government which has made such a mess of community care? What is needed is a sensible mix of public private and voluntary provision. Services must be suited to local needs and not dictated from Whitehall."

The MP added: "The Government should focus its efforts on the quality of care that is being delivered, not on outdated arguments about structure and ownership."

For Immediate Release. No 101/97 Thurs 13 March 1997

NO CHANNEL 5 IN PENDLE

The overwhelming majority of people in Pendle will not be able to receive Channel 5 when the new station starts broadcasting at the end of this month. The news has infuriated local MP, Gordon Prentice, who is on record saying his constituency could become a "technological backwater".

The MP quizzed Heritage Minister Ian Sproat about the geographical coverage of the new channel and was told Pendle would lose out. Yesterday the Minister told the MP: "The closest transmitter to Pendle which will transmit Channel 5 is Winter Hill. It is estimated that this transmitter will not provide a service throughout the Pendle constituency. However, some residents in the south west of the constituency who are on the edge of the predicated coverage area may receive an acceptable service."

The Minister went on: "The Government has always acknowledged that viewers in several parts of the country will not be able to receive Channel 5. It is, however, open to Channel 5

Broadcasting Limited to enhance its coverage in future by other delivery means including cable, satellite and digital terrestrial transmissions."

The Pendle MP commented: "This is simply not good enough. The Government sets the rules and the framework and the result is a broadcasting desert in Pendle. We shall not have Channel 5. Vast tracts of the constituency are not cabled and there are no plans to cable, for example, West Craven. And when digital terrestrial television arrives - bringing up to 20 channels rather than the four we have at the moment - Pendle will again be last in the queue because the broadcasters will aim to cover the most densely populated parts of the country first."

More follows

NO CHANNEL 5 IN PENDLE

"As if all this wasn't enough, about a third of my constituency gets television transmissions from Yorkshire and the Leeds based broadcasters never cover anything in West Craven as they consider it to be outside their area. So we had the ludicrous situation at Christmas where the E Coli outbreak in West Craven appeared on North West television - which isn't picked up in the area. Yorkshire television ignored the outbreak."

The MP added: "We are not country cousins here in Pendle. We should have access to the new information age on exactly the same terms as every other part of the country."

"We pay the same taxes" fumed the MP.

Note to Editors: Last August the MP pressed Nynex to look again at cabling West Craven. The cable giant told him only two small areas from the original Pendle franchise remain to be cabled. Under the terms of the original deal, the West Craven area was excluded. Before the Broadcasting Act 1990, the Cable Authority specified an area to be covered, and it was a condition of the licence that a certain proportion of premises would be passed. The Cable Authority was abolished by the 1990 Act, and its functions taken over by the Independent Television Commission. The ITC permits operators to choose the nature and level of service they wish to offer the public. In response to expressions of interests from particular localities, the ITC draw up a map extending over a fairly wide area, not already covered by a cable franchise, which they intend to advertise. An applicant must then identify which parts the system will serve and if

successful will be licensed to meet this commitment. There is no requirement to go beyond what is economically viable.

For Immediate Release. No 102/97 Mon 17 March 1997

MAJOR FIRES THE STARTING PISTOL

The Prime Minister, John Major, announced today a General Election on 1 May - almost 18 years to the day since the Conservatives took power from the last Labour Government.

Speaking from Westminster, local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "After months of dithering and prevarication all I can say is thank goodness Major has named the day. Labour is ready for office and confident of victory but we are not complacent."

"The choice facing the voters in Pendle is between more division, extremism and insecurity with the Conservatives or a new Labour Government, united, strong and ready to build a new Britain. Already the Conservatives are at sixes and sevens. Nicholas Budgen and other West Midlands Tory MPs are planning to fight their own semi-independent campaign on immigration. Playing the race card and conjuring up a spectre of mass immigration where this is simply a figment of their imagination. They want to scare white voters and they will tell lies about Labour's position if they think it will get them votes."

"The Conservatives traditional supporters in business are also deserting them. A poll of business managers shows that over half of managers want a Labour Government."

"So far as the debates are concerned - Tony Blair is ready and willing. And Paddy Ashdown should not not be excluded. But what a contrast with 1992 when John Major refused a debate saying *"Every Party Leader who expects to lose tries that trick. Every politician who expects to win says no."* Does he now expect to lose?

For Immediate Release. No 103/97 Mon 17 March 1997

VIOLENT CRIME UP

The new crime figures released today show that violent crime is still rising fast. Figures released by Labour's Shadow Home Secretary, Jack Straw, show England and Wales top the international league table for rising crime since 1987.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "Violent crime was up 11% in 1996 and crime has doubled since the Tories came to power in 1979."

"Over these 18 years the Conservatives have ignored the reasons why people drift into crime. Indeed, it was only two years ago that the Government decided to include in its annual grant to Police Authorities, money which recognises the level of young male unemployment. Up until then, Ministers had been denying any link between young male unemployment and crime."

The MP added: "In fact, we were all told by Norman Lamont in 1992 that *"unemployment was a price well worth paying"*. It was a nonsense then and it is nonsense now."

For Immediate Release. No 104/97 Wed 19 March 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS DOWN - BUT STILL HIGHER THAN WHEN JOHN MAJOR BECAME PM

Pendle's jobless total last month fell from 1,842 to 1,739 (4.9%) but the figure is still higher than the unemployment level John Major inherited from his predecessor in November 1990 when he became Prime Minister. Then the figure stood at 1,708. It has been higher than this in every month of John Major's premiership except in two - November and December 1996.

Last month's figures show that 1,377 men are out of work (6.4%) and claiming the Jobseeker's Allowance and 362 women (2.6%). Nationally, unemployment fell by 68,000 to 1.75 million or 6.2% of the workforce.

Commenting on the latest figures, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "We take these figures for what they are worth - which is very little. The Jobseeker's Allowance has driven many people off the unemployment register and we know the figures have been fiddled and massaged so often they bear little connection with reality. We know, for example, that one in five households have no person in work."

"So far as Pendle is concerned, after five and a half years of John Major's premiership we are (almost) back to where we started from."

For Immediate Release. No 105/97 Mon 17 March 1997

RADON CONSULTATION PAPER NOW OUT

Builders in Craven and in other areas affected by the colourless, odourless but radioactive gas, radon, should drop their trowels and get their hands on proposed amendments to the Building Regulations to counter the deadly gas.

The new Building Regulations will ensure that new homes and not just existing ones will be built to standards which significantly reduce the likelihood of high radon levels. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency lies alongside Craven, one of the areas affected, commented: "We need to be aware of radon and take action to protect ourselves against it.. I hope everyone involved in the building trade looks at this document."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP is chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party's Environment Committee. The risk of Radon in Pendle homes at levels where it could pose a threat to health is slight. Data released by the Government last May showed 4,900 dwellings or 13% of all Pendle's homes had a small probability (between 1%-3%) of being above the Government's action level where remedial work on the building is recommended.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas which is a product of the radioactive decay of uranium. It is found in small quantities in all rocks and soils. The gas disperses quickly in the open air, but can accumulate in buildings, especially in areas where the underlying ground contains more uranium than average and is permeable. Radon is a cause for concern because exposure to the gas over time increases the risk of lung cancer, particularly among smokers. In Pendle the chance of houses being above the Government set Action Level is small (between 1% and 3%). Next door, in Craven, the number of homes affected is significantly higher. In Craven 12,100 of all dwellings (52%) have a 1%-3% probability of being above the Action Level. A further 4,400 properties (19%) have a probability of between 3% and 10% of being above the level and 200 homes (1%) have a probability of between 10% and 30% of being over the Action Level.

For Immediate Release. No 106/97 Tues 18 March 1997

CRISIS LOOMS AS SCHOOLS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY GO INTO THE RED

A worrying 43 schools in Lancashire are running deficits where their outgoings are outstripping their income. This is 6% of the total number of schools in the county. Next door in North Yorkshire 22 schools (5%) are in deficit.

The shock figure was revealed in a letter yesterday from Education Minister Robin Squire to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. However, the situation in Lancashire pales into insignificance when set alongside figures from elsewhere around the country. In the only county controlled by the Conservatives, Buckinghamshire, 33 schools are in deficit - 11% of the total. In Tory Westminster, 16% of the total."

"Aside from the unique case of the Corporation of London (1 school in deficit) the highest percentage of schools in deficit is in Manchester where 111 schools (57%) were carrying forward deficits at the end of 1995/6."

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The balances held by individual schools are disappearing faster than ever. They are being raided just to keep the show on the road. When schools go into deficit they turn to the local education authority for help. But they have no cash in the bank either. The situation is grim indeed."

Note to Editors: Schools by law are not permitted to run a deficit. In extremis, Governors could face surcharge. The Local Education Authority can also suspend delegation.

For Immediate Release. No 107/97 Tues 18 March 1997

MP CALLS FOR A "LIVING COUNTRYSIDE"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today called for a "living countryside" where the creation of rural jobs and vibrant rural communities would be at the centre of policy making of an incoming Labour Government.

The MP was speaking at Westminster to a meeting of farm workers - in London to lobby the Agricultural Wages Board, the sole remaining survivor of the old Wages Councils.

The MP told the meeting: “Farming is one of the UK’s most successful industries yet too many of the people working on the land get too little reward for their efforts. A decent working wage depends on an average 9 hours a week overtime. And only 16% of people working in the industry have an occupational pension.”

The MP, who is a member of the Agriculture Select Committee, said: “We need drastically to overhaul the Common Agricultural Policy which costs every family in the land an arm and a leg. We must move away from commodity support mechanisms in favour of environmental and other measures to promote and sustain our rural areas. We need new thinking and a fresh start.”

The MP told the meeting that the report of the Agriculture Select Committee on the Agri-Environment Regulation is to be published tomorrow (Wednesday). The report covers issues such as organic farming and the countryside stewardship scheme.

For Immediate Release. No 108/97 Wed 19 March 1997

SLEAZE BACK ON THE AGENDA

The Conservatives are trying to suppress the report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and Privileges, Gordon Downey, on the cash for questions scandal according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says it is the latest of example of the government's deception, tolerance of sleaze, and untrustworthiness.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: “The Government's clear purpose in proroguing Parliament this Friday - sending it into recess - and not dissolving it until 8 April, is to stop this report seeing the light of day before the general election. And this is despite the fact that this is going to be the longest election campaign since 1918. They have abandoned large parts of their legislative programme to bring an early halt to business - in order to avoid a new blow to their election campaign from the report.”

The MP said: “I expect Downey's final report will be highly critical of disgraced Minister Neil Hamilton and other Tory MPs and former ministers. Hamilton is accused of taking tens of thousands of pounds from Mohammed Al Fayed to ask questions in Parliament.”

The MP added: "A postponement would not require the House to sit and would have no effect on the election process, but would allow the committee to publish the report" said the MP.

Note to Editors: Last month the Pendle MP called for an early Commons debate on the conduct of Neil Hamilton, the former Deregulation Minister who resigned amid allegations of sleaze and corruption. The MP pressed the Government's business manager, Tony Newton, to make time for a debate on the actions of the Tatton MP in threatening bookshops with legal action if they choose to stock the book "Sleaze: the Corruption of Parliament" which documents Hamilton's activities.
More Follows

SLEAZE BACK ON THE AGENDA

The following Early Day Motion appeared on the Order Paper on Friday 28 February in the name of the hon Member for Pendle:

Conduct of the hon Member for Tatton and book shops:

"This House regrets that the hon Member for Tatton, a former Vice Chairman of the Small Business Bureau, who lists bibliomania as a special interest, has instructed his solicitor to threaten legal action against Books *etc.* in Victoria Street and other bookshops in Westminster, in his Tatton constituency and, indeed, nationwide if they stock "Sleaze: the Corruption of Parliament"; believes there is enormous demand for this book and considers that in the interests of freedom of information, the hon Member should refrain from threats of legal action against the book trade and sue, if he is so minded, the publishers and the Guardian newspaper, and further believes readers should be given the chance to make up their own minds about the hon Gentleman's conduct and applauds the decision of Politicos bookshop in Victoria to stock the book."

For Immediate Release. No 109/97 Wed 19 March 1997

MP BACKS CALL FOR MORE ORGANIC FARMING

More should be done to encourage organic farming in the UK says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says less than half a per cent of the country's farmed area is farmed organically - far less than in comparable countries in continental Europe.

The MP was speaking at Westminster on the publication of the Agriculture Select Committee second report on *"the Environmentally Sensitive Areas and other Schemes under the Agri Environment Regulation."*

The MP said: "The Committee's report is a bit of a mouthful and so is much of what we eat. We need to get back to good, tasty and wholesome food grown in an environmentally friendly way."

"In Germany, for example, over 10% of the farmed area is organic and there is no reason on earth why we couldn't move towards that figure. We spend millions paying farmers either to grow crops that aren't needed or for not growing anything."

The MP added: "At the moment farmers are given financial help to convert to organic production - but not to maintain organic farming. In this, we are out of step with other countries in Europe. We see a role for some modest payments to farmers to help maintain organic farming once it has taken root, so to speak."

For Immediate Release. No 110/97 Thurs 20 March 1997

MP INSISTS SLEAZE REPORT MUST NOT BE BURIED

Despite pressure from Labour, the Conservatives are still trying to suppress the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee's report on the cash for questions scandal says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The Committee will now produce an interim report at noon today - clearing a few names - but advance disclosures indicate that several other senior Tories have admitted to receiving far more cash than originally thought. The Times reports, for example, that the report will show former minister Tim Smith admits receiving £18,000, three times as much as previously thought, from businessman Mohammed Al-Fayed.

But it is expected that the interim report has not had time to reach conclusions about disgraced minister Neil Hamilton and other Tory MPs central to the scandal. A cloud still hangs over Hamilton and other Tories standing for re-election, making the case for publication of the full report before the election more urgent than ever.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: “I welcome any exoneration of MPs in the interim report. But I also want to see the full report published before Parliament is prorogued. Voters must have the full information on the conduct of Tory candidates.”

For Immediate Release. No 111/97 Thurs 20 March 1997

LABOUR MOVES INTO CYBERSPACE AT http://www.labourwin97.org.uk.

Labour today launched its own election web site on the internet. It can be visited at http://www.labourwin97.org.uk.

In a separate development, the independent Stevenson Inquiry into Information and Communications Technology in Schools warns that there are failings in Britain's teaching of computer skills in schools and calls for better access to computers for schoolchildren and teachers.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: “An incoming Labour Government will ensure that every school is linked to the information superhighway and the educational opportunities it offers. We want to see a new "national grid for learning" to ensure that schools and colleges have access to materials on the internet relevant to the national curriculum.”

Labour's election web site is the most advanced and interactive of all the parties' sites. It contains information on our policies, on the party, and on the electoral process. There is also a section devoted to schools elections.

Interactive sections include a constituency search where people can find full details of their Labour candidate simply by entering their postcode. From there they can also volunteer for election work by e-mail. Visitors to the site can also join the party or make donations by e-mail.

For Immediate Release. No 112/97 Thurs 20 March 1997

FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF BSE CRISIS

Today is the first anniversary of the start of the latest BSE crisis, when the Government announced that there was a likely link between BSE and CJD in humans says Pendle MP and Agriculture Select Committee member, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: “One year on, the Government flounders, and still the ban is in place.”

“With a year of the BSE crisis behind them, the Government has demonstrated conclusively that it is incompetent and untrustworthy. The Government has failed to get the EU beef ban lifted, despite all promises to the contrary. They have wasted £3.5 billion of taxpayers' money on the crisis - £13O for every tax payer in the country.”

“And while Hogg bumbles around Europe in silly hats, the Government continues to insult voters' intelligence with their far-fetched claims about BSE. The recent scandal over suppression of meat hygiene reports on abattoirs shows they cannot be trusted with food safety.

The MP added: “Throughout the crisis, Labour along with the NFU has been calling for decisive action to save our beef industry. An incoming Labour government will restore Britain's credibility in Europe and ensure that the agreement reached at Florence is met. We will press ahead with proposals for a certified herd scheme, the first step in the lifting of the ban.”

For Immediate Release. No 113/97 Friday 21 March 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE VISITING PENDLE COMMUNITY HOSPITAL, NELSON, TODAY FRIDAY 21 MARCH AT 10.15am.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting Pendle Community Hospital today to meet the staff and patients.

For Immediate Release. No 114/97 Friday 21 March 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE VISITING THE EAST LANCASHIRE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TODAY FRIDAY 21 MARCH AT 2pm.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be meeting Michael Damms, Chief Executive of the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce today at 2pm at Red Rose Court, Clayton Business Park, Clayton-le-Moors to discuss economic and commercial issues facing business people the region.

For Immediate Release. No 115/97 Mon 24 March 1997

PENDLE FAMILIES FACE £46m DEBT INTEREST BILL

Interest payments on the national debt are costing every family in Pendle over £1,300 a year says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking in his Pendle constituency earlier today, the MP said Conservative mismanagement of the economy had landed Britain with a mountain of debt.

The figures have been complied from official sources - the last Budget report and the 1991 census. They show that the national debt alone comes to £411 billion by the end of this month compared to £194 billion in March 1991.

The MP said: "Interest payments on the national debt alone come to £29.8 billion - more than total spending on law and order and transport. In Pendle debt interest is now costing families £46 million. The Conservatives have presided over this huge increase in the national debt because of their inability to tackle mass unemployment and spiralling public borrowing. Their failure is all the more striking because of the £220 billion proceeds they have had from North Sea oil."

"At the last General Election, the Conservatives promised lower taxes and sound public finances. Instead, under John Major the national debt has doubled despite the largest ever peacetime hike in taxes. We are paying more tax for lower investment and worse public services. We are all footing the bill for the Government's incompetence."

For Immediate Release. No 116/97 Wed 2 April 1997

LIB DEMS CAN'T WIN PENDLE SAYS TONY GREAVES

The Liberal Democrat candidate in Pendle in the May 1st General Election, Tony Greaves, has admitted his Party is on course for a mauling at the polls. He predicts that half the existing Lib Dem MPs could lose their seats.

In a hitherto under-reported article written just over four months ago in *Liberal Democrat News* (15 November 1996), the veteran old style Liberal attacked both the Labour Party and his own leadership - calling on his Party to *"wake from its slumber"*.

In the article Greaves bemoans the Lib Dem opinion poll ratings which *"slip ever closer to single figures*". He goes on: *"The worry*

is no longer what candidates in non-target areas and Labour seats are supposed to say and do in the election. It's the danger of losing half our existing seats rather than which targets we might gain."

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, observed: "It seems to be all over bar the shouting so far as the Lib Dem candidate in Pendle is concerned. He has given up the ghost."

The MP added: "Recent opinion polls show a slight narrowing of the gulf between Labour and the other parties but we always expected that to happen once the campaign started."

Note to Editors: In the April 1992 election, Labour took 44% of the vote, the Conservatives 40% and the Lib Dems 15%.
(The formal dissolution of Parliament is on 8 April. Those serving in the 92-97 Parliament are MPs until that date.)

For Immediate Release. No 117/97 Tues 25 March 1997

PRENTICE PROMISES ACTION AGAINST ASSAULTS AT WORK IN PENDLE

"A Labour Government will take concerted action to reduce assaults on people at work in Pendle says local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP hit the headlines last month when he braved the threat of physical violence when he forced the closure of a "one day sale" in the Marsden area of Nelson.

Speaking in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: "Roughly 350,000 people are assaulted at work every year - more than 1,000 incidents every working day. For every employee injured in an accident at work, two are deliberately assaulted. It's happening to all sorts of people - bus crews, park keepers, bank staff, doctors, nurses and ambulance staff."

'"That can't be right. People go to work in Pendle to earn a living. They should not be the targets of violence. Yet the number of assaults at work has doubled in 10 years. A Labour Government will reverse that trend - measures to counter violence must outpace the louts - not the other way around."

"The Government has failed employees in Pendle. A Labour Government will act where the Tories have not. We will make every effort to stem the tide of workplace violence."

Note to Editors: If somebody is brought home from work in an ambulance it's probably because they have been beaten up. Roughly 350,000 people are assaulted at work every year - more than 1,000 incidents every working day. For every employee injured in an accident at work, two are deliberately assaulted.

That can't be right. People go to work to earn a living. They are not paid to be the targets of violence. They shouldn't be the targets of violence. Yet the

PRENTICE PROMISES ACTION AGAINST ASSAULTS AT WORK IN PENDLE

number of assaults at work has doubled in 10 years. A Labour Government will reverse that trend.

There are a lot of people at risk. Bank, building society and post office staff being battered for their employer's money. Social security staff being set upon for applying the Government's rules. Shop assistants clouted for stopping shoplifters. Caretakers, park keepers and teachers getting duffed up when they try to get youths to behave properly. Bus crews, taxi drivers, ticket inspectors casually set upon by louts. Police, ambulance crews and firefighters targeted by yobs, sometimes just for entertainment's sake. And in recent years the most extraordinary development - doctors and nurses and hospital staff battered in accident and emergency departments or when they are out on a mission of mercy. Things have got so bad that recently they had to open a police post in a hospital to protect the staff.

This is partly as a result of the general rise in loutish behaviour. But it's also because of changed layouts and new working practices which have increased the exposure of staff to assaults. That's because saving staff from assaults has had a lower priority than short-term cost savings and fancy new layouts.

Labour's proposals

A Labour Government will take concerted action to reduce assaults on people at work. We will press police, prosecutors and courts to take assaults at work more seriously. We want to see more arrests, more prosecutions, more convictions and more severe punishments. We've also got to be tough on the causes of workplace assaults. We've got to stop people getting bashed up at work in the first place. 'That's better for everybody - especially

the victims. That will mean every employer whose staff come in contact with the public must review every workplace to make sure it makes assaults on staff more difficult. That can mean more physical protection such as screens and counters, more secure cabs and kiosks, more quick response alarms, more closed circuit TV.

With a Labour Government, all concerned will be required to take this problem more seriously including the private sector as well as the NHS, Benefits Agency and local councils. Most employers will be willing to do these things because it will be better and cheaper in the long run.

For Immediate Release. No 118/97 Tues 25 March 1997

BYPASS INQUIRY WILL GO AHEAD

The Roads Minister, John Watts, has told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that the public inquiry into the proposed Colne/Foulridge Bypass will go ahead as planned by the end of August.

The MP had written to the Minister following a public meeting at Foulridge Village Hall in February where residents called for a short delay to the Inquiry to allow the actual increased traffic flow at the Vivary Bridge roundabout to be measured.

The MP commented: “The whole thing is most unsatisfactory. We don’t have all the information we should have to make a balanced judgement. It is entirely typical of this Government.”

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP wrote to the Transport Minister, Sir George Young on 24 February as follows: “As you will know, Lancashire County Council is proposing to build a new bypass from Colne to Foulridge which will take traffic from the end of the M65 at the Vivary Bridge roundabout past the town of Colne and the village of Foulridge, to join the A56 just before the village of Kelbrook. The second leg of the bypass from Kelbrook past Earby to the county boundary is some way off and the County intends to build the second stage as and when resources become available. Much of the detailed planning work for the second stage has not yet been done and it is my understanding that North Yorkshire County Council has done very little indeed in terms of detailed work on the roads system from the county boundary to the A59.

Last November, the County Council triggered the compulsory purchase procedures and the new bypass, which had featured for years as a possibility, then became very real to local people. Many of them feared that without the bypass Colne would be engulfed by traffic coming off the end of the motorway and that traffic volumes would increase following the link-up in November 1997 between the M65 at Blackburn and the M6. John Watts has confirmed that following the link-up, traffic will increase cast of Blackburn by about 10% (four and a half thousand vehicles per day) but your Department has provided no estimates of the increase in traffic volume at the end of the motorway at Colne. For this, I have had to rely on

BYPASS INQUIRY WILL GO AHEAD

Lancashire County Council, who tell me they expect an additional two to two and a half thousand vehicles. Your Department also recently confirmed that no work had been done on estimating the likely transfer of trans-Pennine traffic from the M62 to the M65/A56 and people here in Pendle can do little other than speculate.

It was in that context that villagers in Foulridge put to me at a public meeting on Friday 14 February that the Public Inquiry into the roads proposals should be put back a few months so that people could actually see for themselves the increased traffic volume. There were complaints at the meeting that Lancashire County Council did not have fully worked up projections of the increased traffic volumes, although in a letter to me in December 1996, the Borough Engineer did say that these would be available before the Public Inquiry.

You will know that the bypass issue excites tremendous passions and that while the four Local Authorities (Lancashire & North Yorkshire County Councils and Pendle & Craven District Councils) are in favour of the bypass, there are significant numbers of people who are against it. There are those who resist any further road building on green belt land and there are others who believe that building only the first leg of the bypass would simply transfer the problem upstream.

Perhaps you could let me have your views on the point put to me that, in the light of all the circumstances, there is nothing to be lost by putting back the date of the Public Inquiry by a couple of months so that the increased traffic flow after November 1997 can actually be measured.

Note to Editors 2: The Roads Minister, John Watts, wrote to the Pendle MP on 19 March as follows: COLNE/FOULRIDGE BYPASS "Thank you for your letter of 24 February to Sir George Young about the above named highway scheme proposed by Lancashire County Council. As you have pointed out, Lancashire County Council has along with other associated consents, submitted a Compulsory Purchase Order to the Secretary of State for Transport for confirmation which would give them the necessary authority to construct the Bypass.

It would appear, from the number of objections lodged against the proposal, that Public Local Inquiries will be necessary. The arrangements for holding such proceedings are governed by a timetable set out in the Inquiries Procedure Rules; regulations designed to speed up the decision making process, in relation to orders, so as to reduce uncertainty. The County Council, in accordance with the regulations, has been asked to provide dates and a venue for the holding of the Inquiries. The latest date for those proceedings must be no more than 22 weeks from receipt of the request for dates. With this in mind, Inquiries must commence before the end of August 1997.

The concerns of local people over proposals such as the Colne/Foulridge Bypass are understandable. The Public Inquiries procedures will therefore afford an opportunity for them to air those concerns before an independent Inspector and for the Secretary of State to take them into consideration before coming to his decision on whether the orders should be confirmed. I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

For Immediate Release. No 119/97 Wed 2 April 1997

PRENTICE CHALLENGES TORY CANDIDATE
"TO COME CLEAN" ON MANIFESTO

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice today challenged Tory hopeful, John Midgley, to come clean on his attitude to his Party's manifesto.

Coinciding with the launch of the Tory manifesto today, the MP quizzed Mr Midgley on his views and whether these were in line with the official Conservative policy.

The MP said: "The Conservative manifesto will go down like a lead balloon here in Pendle. It offers nothing to the vast majority of people."

Press Releases: Complete set

Note to Editors: Letter enclosed.

For Immediate Release. No 120/97 Wed 2 April 1997

TORY MANIFESTO "DISHONEST" SAYS PRENTICE

The Tory manifesto appears this morning, and already we know it is dangerous, dishonest and desperate says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Gordon Prentice said, "Nobody will trust the new Tory promises about tax when they broke every promise they made at the last election, Introducing 22 new taxes when they had promised to cut taxes. The question for John Major this morning is where the £1.3 billion coming from for his risky and Irresponsible tax plans?"

"The Tories are promising that Britain will have the lowest tax burden of any major European economy. But since 1992 a typical family has paid more than £2,000 in extra tax because of 22 new taxes. The Tories are promising to get public spending down below 40 per cent of GDP. They promised that in 1992 and yet public spending's share has risen. And to get public spending down that low would require spending cuts of around £9 billion."

"The Tories say they will eliminate public sector borrowing by the year 2000. But they have borrowed over £60 billion more than they forecast In 1992 - to pay the bills of economic failure. The Tories are promising to keep inflation below 2.5 per cant. But current inflation is 2.9 per cent - well above their target for the end of this parliament."

The MP added: "On economic issues, they can't be trusted to do what they say. If the Tories haven't delivered In the last 18 years, why should we believe them now?"

For Immediate Release. No 121/97 Wed 2 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE SERVING BEHIND THE COUNTER AT R. M. LEES, DISPENSING CHEMISTS, 6 MARKET STREET, NELSON at 3pm on FRIDAY 4 APRIL 1997

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be donning a white coat this Friday when he helps out local chemist, Roger Lee.

The MP is a keen supporter of community pharmacies.

For Immediate Release. No 123/97 Mon 7 April 1997

TORY CANDIDATE SNUBS WEST CRAVEN

Moves by the Barnoldswick Council of Churches to hold an election meeting in the town have been scuppered by the Conservative candidate, John Midgley. He apparently believes that only one election meeting is needed for the entire campaign - the one to be held in Colne's Minicipal Hall on 17 April.

The Barlick husting would have pitted all four candidates against each other in front of an audience of West Craveners.

The area's sitting MP, Gordon Prentice, said today he was "deeply disappointed" at the actions of his Conservative challenger.

"I understand the Barnoldswick Council of Churches will be advising West Craveners to travel over to Colne on 17 April - and I hope they do. But it is all so unnecessary. I am prepared to share any platform, anytime, anywhere with the other three candidates. Why won't the Conservative do the same?"

For Immediate Release. No 124/97 Mon 7 April 1997

"PHANTOM CANDIDATE" JIBE FROM PRENTICE

The Liberal Democrat's are running a "phantom candidate" for Parliament says Labour's Gordon Prentice. He says the Lib Dem standard bearer, Tony Greaves, is concentrating on holding his county council seat - the election is on the same day, May 1, as the Westminster poll - and has already written off his chances of toppling the area's Labour MP.

Prentice observed: "We are now seeing the usual Focus leaflets dropping through the letterboxes. Predictably, Tony Greaves is described in glowing terms but, astonishingly, they fail to mention he is their Westminster hopeful! Is it supposed to be a secret?"

"The plain fact is that Greaves let the cat out of the bag four months ago - before he was selected at the last minute to fight the Westminster seat - when he admitted his Party was on course

for a mauling at the polls. Writing in the *Liberal Democrat News* (15 November 1996) he predicted that half the existing Lib Dem MPs could lose their seats.

In the hitherto under-reported article, the veteran old style Liberal attacked both the Labour Party and his own leadership - calling on his Party to *"wake from its slumber"*. In the article Greaves bemoans the Lib Dem opinion poll ratings which *"slip ever closer to single figures*". He goes on: *"The worry is no longer what candidates in non-target areas and Labour seats are supposed to say and do in the election. It's the danger of losing half our existing seats rather than which targets we might gain."*

Prentice said: "He has, quite literally, written off his own chances."

Note to Editors: In the April 1992 election, Labour took 44% of the vote, the Conservatives 40% and the Lib Dems 15%.

For Immediate Release. No 125/97 Mon 7 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING BURNLEY AND PENDLE HOSPICE TODAY (Monday) AT 7.30pm

Gordon Prentice will be meeting Joyce Cooper and others this evening when he visits the Burnley and Pendle Hospice, Pendleside, Colne Road, Reedley (near the Magistrates Court)

For Immediate Release. No 125/97 Mon 7 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING TOWNHOUSE SCHOOL, TOWNHOUSE ROAD, NELSON at 11am on Wednesday, 9th April to see the young people make his campaign badges.

The school has its own badge company (Townhouse Badge Company) which was set up in January 1994 when the school purchased a badge making machine. They make a wide variety of badges for local organisations and others further afield.

The badge company work is part of the curriculum for young adults. All the students are directors of the company.

For Immediate Release. No 127/97 Mon 7 April 1997

CORRUPTION: HAMILTON MUST GO

The Labour Party has welcomed the intervention of respected BBC reporter, Martin Bell, as anti-sleaze candidate in the contest in Neil Hamilton's Tatton constituency.

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats have put their differences to one side and are standing down their candidates in favour of the veteran war correspondent.

Speaking earlier today in Nelson, Labour's Gordon Prentice said: "Tomorrow night is crunch time for Neil Hamilton when he is to be formally adopted - or not - by the Tatton Conservative Association. If he stands down or is deselected, there would be a normal contest with Labour and the Liberal Democrats fielding their candidates. If not, then it is Hamilton vs. Bell and I think I know who the winner will be."

Prentice added: "Hamilton is unfit to be an MP. He is on record as having lied to the Deputy Prime Minister about whether he accepted payments either direct from Mr al Fayed or via any lobbyist. If he can look his colleague Michael Heseltine in the eye and lie at the same time, he can do anything."

Note to Editors: Back in February, Prentice pressed the Government's business manager, Tony Newton, to make time for a debate on the actions of the Tatton MP in threatening bookshops with legal action if they chose to stock the book "Sleaze: the Corruption of Parliament" which documents Hamilton's activities.

For Immediate Release. No 128/97 Mon 7 April 1997

TORY PENSION PLAN UNRAVELS says PRENTICE

The Conservatives' plans to privatise state pensions are unravelling badly says Pendle's Labour standard-bearer, Gordon Prentice.

A new analysis to be screened on tonight's World in Action programme shows that there are still major problems with personal pensions of the kind the Tories went to force everybody into. For as many as one in three people, the investigation will show, the fees and charges of personal pensions make them worth less then their savings by the time they retire.

Prentice said: “The Tories have still not cleaned up the scandal of mis-sold pensions: only 7,000 of 600,00 victims have been compensated, and 18,000 people have died while waiting. The Tories have no proposals to tackle the problem of unfair fees and charges. And they have no idea how they will pay for their pension plans: the figures just don't add up. The government has already been forced to admit that the scheme would cost at least £330 million a year - more than double the figure they initially claimed.”

Prentice continued: “By contrast, Labour has a clear programme for giving people security In retirement. We have renewed our commitment to the basic state pension. We will create a new framework of second "stakeholder" pensions to give people on low and modest incomes a good-value second pension. We will speed up compensation to those mis-sold personal pensions by setting individual targets, and reform the Financial Services Act to make sure that such a scandal does not happen again.”

For Immediate Release. No 129/97 Tues 8th April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING WHEATLEY COURT, WHEATLEY CLOSE, FENCE at 11am today, Tuesday, 8 April.

Gordon Prentice will be meeting the staff and residents of Wheatley Court Home for the Elderly at 11am today.

For Immediate Release. No 130/97 Tues 8th April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISTING THE ST. JOSEPH'S PARISH CENTRE CLUB, BOLLANDER ST. (off Gisburn Rd.) BARNOLDSWICK ON THURSDAY 10 APRIL AT 12.30PM.

Gordon Prentice will be having lunch with club members and Parish Priest, Fr. Paul Reid on Thursday 10 April.

For Immediate Release. No 131/97 Tues 8 April 1997

PRENTICE WELCOMES REPORT FROM CHURCHES

The report from the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland on 'Unemployment and the Future of Work" has been welcomed by Labour’s Westminster candidate, Gordon Prentice. He said the report, released today, is a damning indictment of the Tories' record.

The report claims that the real unemployment figure is 4.5 million - roughly twice the level of the claimant count. One in five households with someone of working age has no one in work.

Prentice said: “More than 800,000 people earn less than £2.50 an hour. A staggering 300,000 earn less then £1.50. Here in Pendle low pay is rife. Between 1979 and 1993/94 real average household income rose by 40 per cent, but for the poorest tenth of households it fell by 13 per cent.”

“I agree with the report's conclusions. The Tories have presided over massive unemployment and growing inequality. We have already pledged a programme to get people back to work. We will get 250,000 under 25 year-olds off benefit and into work by using money from a windfall levy on the privatised utilities.”

“Basic skills are a top priority for young people. Our Target 2,000 programme will ensure that by the year 2000, by the age 18 all young people have an intermediate qualification (NVQ Level 2).”

Prentice added: “We will bring in a minimum wage and we will break down the barriers which prevent lone mothers working. We have a programme to get people back to work.”

For Immediate Release. No 132/97 Tues 8 April 1997

PRENTICE RIDICULES TORY PROMISES TO HELP SMALL BUSINESSES

The Conservative pledge to help small businesses was described as the latest campaign joke by Labour’s candidate in Pendle, Gordon Prentice. Speaking in Nelson earlier today, he said small businesses had been crucified by the Government since 1992.

“Small businesses here in Pendle have had an incredibly difficult time over recent years. Barnoldswick, where I live, has had as difficult a time as any town.”

The reality is that a business has gone bust on average every three minutes of every working day since the 1992 election. Now small business owners are deserting the Tories because taxes have gone up for small businesses. They have hit them with 11 tax increases plus huge extra administrative costs related to the introduction of income tax self-assessment, which will cost the self-employed £850 million.”

"Petty regulations have multiplied - since the beginning of the Deregulation Initiative in 1994, 13 times as many regulations have been introduced as have been scrapped. There is also the problem of problem of late payment with the average payment period in the UK rising from 48 days in 1995 to 50 in 1996."
"Years too late, the Conservatives now promise tax help to small business. What they didn't say was that the rest of business would have to pay for their proposals to cut the Uniform Business Rate (UBR) for small businesses."

"Today's proposals would mean a tax rise for medium and large businesses. And ministers rejected the recommendation of the government's own deregulation taskforce that the UBR should be *re-localised*. The taskforce said that the principle of re-

localisation, endorsed by Labour, would be the *"most powerful tool"* to promote local business development."

"We will introduce a statutory right to interest on late payments from companies above a certain threshold size. We will promote effective regulation with our red tape taskforce, cutting unnecessary bureaucracy and compliance costs."

"On the UBR, Labour wants the rate to be set locally, with a requirement on local authorities to consult businesses about the rate. There will be legal protection to ensure that councils set a fair balance between domestic council tax payers and business payers and do not overburden local businesses."

Prentice mused: "If the Conservatives claim to be the party of business, why have taxes and petty regulations increased for small businesses? They don't have an answer to that one."

For Immediate Release. No 133/97 Wed 9 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING THE MARSDEN SOCIAL AND WORK DAY CENTRE, MANCHESTER ROAD, NELSON (on the edge of Nelson Town Centre) at 2pm today, Wednesday 9 April.

Gordon Prentice will be meeting the Manager, Mr McLean, staff and the people at the Centre.

For Immediate Release. No 134/97 Wed 9 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE SERVING BEHIND THE COUNTER AT PENNEY'S PHARMACY, 19, RAINHALL ROAD, BARNOLDSWICK ON FRIDAY 11 APRIL AT 11.00am

Gordon Prentice will be seeing life from the other side of the counter at this community pharmacy in Barnoldswick.

For Immediate Release. No 135/97 Wed 9 April 1997

PRENTICE VOWS "LABOUR WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE"

The election of a new Labour Government on May 1st will make a real difference to the people of Pendle. This was the theme of the sitting MP for Pendle, Gordon Prentice, who was formally adopted last Friday as the Labour Party's candidate in the General Election.

Speaking to a packed meeting of Labour Party members at the Silverman Hall in Nelson, Mr Prentice said the election was all about fairness and being straight with people - saying what a Labour Government would do and then doing it.

Mr Prentice said: "People are fed up hearing about the broken promises of the Tory Government and the dishonesty of their whole approach. Their posters - from the 1992 "Labour's Tax Bombshell" through to the infamous "Devil's Eyes" - were all pure invention. This election is about hope versus fear with the Conservatives trading on the latter."

"The Conservatives care about the few. Labour about the many. Their proposals to get rid of Capital Gains Tax and Inheritance Tax will benefit 5,000 people in the entire country - about the population of Earby. Yet the cost will be paid by the rest of us."

"At the last election the Tories concealed from the voters a gigantic budget deficit. In 1992 the country was, in effect, £50 billion overdrawn. That explains why taxes were hiked up immediately afterwards. And during the time John Major has been Prime Minister the national debt has doubled. The cost of servicing the debt every year costs more than we spend on transport and law and order combined."

more follows

PRENTICE VOWS
"LABOUR WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE"

"A Labour Government will have different priorities from the Conservatives. We will look at every £ of the £320 billion we spend as a nation and we shall ensure it is spent wisely - in the interests of all of us and not just a privileged few."

"So we shall get rid of the Assisted Places Scheme where money is spent on a tiny number of young people and use the money to get class sizes down below 30 for all 5,6 and 7 year olds. We shall do precisely the same exercise across all the areas of Government spending - from Agriculture right through to Trade and Industry. The Conservatives' priorities are not ours."

Mr Prentice went on: "Labour will get people back to work - in decent jobs. We shall train people for the new jobs of the future. We shall embrace the new Information Age. We shall tackle inequalities and bring the word fairness back into the lexicon of Government. And we shall not forget our pensioners who deserve better."

"After 18 years of Conservative Government, Labour will make a difference."

For Immediate Release. No 136/97 Thurs 10 April 1997

PRENTICE SINGS FOR HIS SUPPER AT ST JOSEPH'S

St Joseph's Parish Centre in Barnoldswick welcomed Gordon Prentice to lunch today to face a grilling from over a hundred Barnoldswick pensioners.

The Labour Candidate told the pensioners there was no such thing as a free lunch and that he would take questions from everyone after the plates had been cleared away by Father Paul Reid and other helpers.

Speaking afterwards, Prentice said: "The lunch was superb - a steak pie with potatoes and carrots followed by pudding and rounded off with a hot cup of tea. The Centre which is open to everyone is a great asset to the town."

The man bidding for a second term at Westminster added: “I was quizzed about pensions and the future of the health service and other topical issues. I shared a lunch table with five ladies who had views on every issue under the sun. And they told me in no uncertain terms what they thought about things and what had to be done in the future!”

After saying a few words after lunch, Mr Prentice thanked Father Paul and the organisers for the invitation saying he had enjoyed the company - and the lunch - immensely.

For Immediate Release. No 137/97 Thurs 10 April 1997

PRENTICE WARNS OF BOGUS “EUROPEAN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANTS”

Con men masquerading as business advisers offering the chance of “European Business Development Grants” to cash strapped businesses from are operating in the area. However, they picked the wrong “victim” when they contacted Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term at Westminster as the area’s MP.

Speaking from his office in Carr Road, Nelson, this afternoon, Mr Prentice said: “I was phoned on three occasions in the space of 30 minutes this afternoon by three different people, employed by three allegedly different companies, all trying to interest me in “European Business Development Grants”. First, they wanted to know if I was “the owner of the business” they had contacted by phone and whether I would be interested in applying for a grant (minimum £5,000) from the European Union which had apparently allocated £13.4m for business grants. New computer equipment was suggested! They said they would want an introductory fee for the service. I told them they were cheats.”

Prentice continued: “This is a classic scam to take money on false pretences. There would be no grant. No return of the fee. Nothing. Over the past five years I have had to deal with a number of local business people who have unfortunately fallen for this trick. My advice is “steer well clear” of this particular preying mantis.”

Prentice added: “Genuine business advisory firms will not put a bar on telephone call back. If a caller rings about a grant, punch 1471 and see if there is a call back number. When I asked who was phoning me I was given the name Carlton and Smith, 59

Marsden Way, Manchester M24 4DQ (address bogus) and a phone number 0161 229 4241 (unobtainable) .

For Immediate Release. No 138/97 Mon 14 April 1997

PRENTICE TARGETED BY PRO HUNTING GROUPS

Pro hunting groups are targeting Gordon Prentice - the man who is bidding for a second term at Westminster as Pendle's MP. Last Friday, the Lancashire Evening Telegraph reported that the pro-hunt lobby was doing all it could to ensure the defeat of Prentice at the polls.

The Field magazine published a hit list of 72 MPs committed to banning bloodsports.

Commenting on the press stories, Prentice said: "My views on this subject are well known. If I am returned as Pendle's MP in the new Parliament, I will vote to ban hunting with hounds. I am opposed to fox hunting and hare coursing and hunting stags with hounds. My position on these matters is crystal clear."

"In days gone by bear baiting and cock fighting were considered acceptable. But not now. So what is so different about stag hunting with hounds? We are told fox hunts are needed to control the fox population but only a tiny fraction of the foxes that die each year are killed by hounds in a fox hunt."

"It is simply unacceptable to kill animals for "pleasure". That is the bottom line."

Note to editors: Labour's policy recognises that deer and other animals need to be culled and their numbers controlled. Labour accepts that shooting is necessary in game conservation.

For Immediate Release. No 139/97 Mon 14 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING GIBFIELD SCHOOL, COLNE, TOMORROW, TUESDAY 15 APRIL AT 11AM

The man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice, will be meeting the head, Mr Cohen, staff and children at Gibfield Special School, Gibfield Road, Colne, tomorrow.

For Immediate Release. No 140/97 Mon 14 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE OPENING THE LABOUR PARTY'S CAMPAIGN HQ at 17 Albert Road, Barnoldswick (Barlick Town Square - you can't miss it!) tomorrow, Tuesday, 15 April, at 10.30am.

Labour's campaign in West Craven has got off to a flying start, and tomorrow, the Campaign Team moves up a gear with the opening at 10.30am of the new Campaign HQ smack, bang in the middle of town.

For Immediate Release. No 141/97 Mon 14 April 1997

PRENTICE WELCOMES NELSON ELECTION FORUM

The man bidding for a second term at Westminster as the area's MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the initiative taken by the Pendle Inter-Faith Group in organising an election forum this Friday (18 April). The hustings will take place at St Mary's Centre, Maurice Street, Nelson at 7pm.

Gordon Prentice commented: "I hope the Conservative challenger, John Midgley, will not duck out of this one. His decision not to participate in the election meeting organised by the Barnoldswick Council of Churches effectively scuppered that event."

"If he pulls out of this one, my view is we should press on without him. There should be an empty chair if he is not there. Or perhaps he should send someone along to represent him. Perhaps his Agent, I don't know."

"What a strange way he has of persuading the electorate to vote for him. This is a General Election not a game of hide and seek. I hope he turns up."

For Immediate Release. No 141/97 Mon 14 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING LONTEX, FERNBANK AVE, BARNOLDSWICK at 11.30am on Wednesday 16 April.

Gordon Prentice will be visiting Lontex in Barnoldswick on Wednesday at 11.30am.

For Immediate Release. No 142/97 Sun 13 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Favordale Home for the Elderly, Byron Rd, Colne tomorrow, Monday 14 April 1997, at 10.30am.

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, will be saying hello to residents and staff at Lancashire County Council's Favordale Home for the Elderly, Byron Road, Colne.

For Immediate Release. No 143/97 Tues 15 April 1997

PRENTICE RIDICULES "THREE CARD TRICK"(not sent)

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, has ridiculed the campaign of one of his challengers, Tony Greaves, as a "three card trick".

Tony Greaves, the veteran, old style Liberal, has a seat on Pendle Borough Council and is seeking re-election to Lancashire County Council. In a last minute intervention late last year he decided to stand for Parliament too.

24 hours before nominations close, Prentice commented: "This is clearly someone who gets a high from seeing his name on a ballot paper. On his own admission he can't win. Last November, he told the readers of the *Liberal Democrat News* (15 November) the LibDems would have trouble retaining the Parliamentary seats they currently hold - let alone win constituencies such as Pendle."

Note to Editors: Greaves let the cat out of the bag four months ago - before he was selected at the last minute to fight the Westminster seat - when he admitted his Party was on course for a mauling at the polls. Writing in the *Liberal Democrat News* (15 November 1996) he predicted that half the existing Lib Dem MPs could lose their seats.

In the hitherto under-reported article the veteran old style Liberal attacked both the Labour Party and his own leadership - calling on his Party to *"wake from its slumber"*. In the article Greaves bemoans the Lib Dem opinion poll ratings which *"slip ever closer to single figures*". He goes on: *"The worry is no longer what candidates in non-target areas and Labour seats are supposed to say and do in the election. It's the danger of losing half our existing seats rather than which targets we might gain."*

For Immediate Release. No 144/97 Tues 15 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Cleveland Guest Engineering at 9.30am on Thursday 17 April 1997.

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, will be visiting the Colne Engineering firm, Cleveland Guest. He will be chatting to the people working there about the firm's plans for the future.

For Immediate Release. No 145/97 Tues 15 April 1997

NHS DENTISTRY IN CRISIS SAYS PRENTICE

The decision of Paul Hadfield, the NHS dentists in Barnoldswick who last week closed his list to new adult patients underlines the crisis facing NHS dentistry says Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP.

Prentice, who lives in the town, has frequently criticised the Government's reluctance to act in areas such as North East Lancashire which he has described as "dental deserts".

Speaking from his Campaign HQ in Barnoldswick earlier today, Prentice said: "It is an absolute tragedy that NHS dentists are being put in this position. Paul Hadfield's letter to the Barnoldswick and Earby Times last week points up the scale of the problem."

"NHS dentistry should be a high priority for the Government. Especially here in North East Lancashire. Our children in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale have the worst dental health in England."

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"NHS dentistry should be a high priority for the Government. Especially here in North East Lancashire. Our children in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale have the worst dental health in England."

For Immediate Release. No 146/97 Tues 15 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Albert Hartley, Crow Nest Mill, Barnoldswick at 2pm on Thursday 17 April 1997.

Gordon Prentice will be visiting the Barnoldswick Textile firm, Albert Hartley, and meeting Managing Director, Michael Blomeley, and the other people working there.

For Immediate Release. No 147/97 Wed 16 April 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS -BACK TO WHERE IT STARTED FROM

The number of people out of work in Pendle and claiming the Jobseeker's Allowance in March was almost exactly the same as the number in November 1990 when John Major became premier.

The March figure, released today, is 1,713 compared with 1708, six and a half years ago when Major became Prime Minister. In Pendle last month 4.8% of the working population were out of work and claiming benefit (this is the workforce rate which includes the armed forces and people on training schemes. Excluding these the rate is 5.7%). 1,344 men were out of work (6.2%) and 369 women (2.6%). There were 409 notified vacancies at the JobCentre in Nelson and 202 in Colne.

Gordon Prentice commented: "We have seen 32 changes in the way in which the unemployment figures are calculated so we are not comparing like with like. Every change - except one - has massaged the number downwards. And we are now seeing

revelations in the press about fiddled figures. The Jobseeker's Allowance has had the effect of removing thousands more from the register."

"Unemployment in Pendle during the Major years has been a bad experience. In only two months (November and December last year) were the totals below the figure the PM inherited all those years ago. Over this period, the total cost to the Exchequer of Pendle's jobless has been £148,683,750." *

Note to Editors: *based on Treasury methodology which assumes a cost of £9,000 per unemployed person per year.

For Immediate Release. No 148/97 Friday 18 April 1997

TORY CANDIDATE WANTS REFERENDUM ON WHETHER UK SHOULD GET OUT OF EUROPE

The Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Pendle, John Midgley, told an all-party election meeting in Colne last night that there should be a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. He has already stated in his election literature that he would *"oppose a single European currency and further threats to our national sovereignty."*

The man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "It is as plain as a pikestaff that Tory candidates can say and do what they like. So far as I am aware, a referendum on Britain's continued membership of the EU is not being proposed by the official Conservative Party and is not in the manifesto. Yet here we have the official Conservative candidate in Pendle departing from the text and saying he wants one."

Prentice continued: "I am left wondering why there is a Referendum Party candidate here in Pendle when the Conservative candidate takes the line he does."

"The Referendum Party candidate, Damian Hockney has some pretty bizarre views. He told the meeting last night he was in favour of hanging *"with safeguards"*! He also said he would allow the export of arms to any country in the world - even the most oppressive dictatorship - on the grounds that if we didn't do it some other country would. He also said that if elected he would stay on as MP for the full five year term. I thought it was the

policy of the Referendum Party to dissolve itself after the referendum had happened."

"Damian Hockney is a jolly character with very weird views."

For Immediate Release. No 149/97 Saturday 19 April 1997

SNEAKY THIEVES PINCH POSTERS

A giant 5ft by 3ft Labour poster has disappeared from a prime site in Cotton Tree Lane. It is the latest in a series of unexplained disappearances of the popular Labour election posters.

The man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP commented: "Labour posters are going up everywhere. There is a tremendous demand for them but there's no danger of us running out. We have a big supply. Conservative posters are plastered across the front of their Cross Street HQ. I've also seen them on a white Land Rover but that is about it. The Liberal Democrat posters are also very thin on the ground."

"I say this to the sneaky thieves: *"There's no need to walk away with our posters - we are giving them away free. Simply phone our hotline number 612573 and we'll give you what you need to display in a location of your choosing!"*

For Immediate Release. No 150/97 Mon 21 April 1997

PRENTICE WARNS AGAINST POST OFFICE SELL OFF

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, has today called upon the Conservative candidate, John Midgley, to say where he stands on post office privatisation.

Gordon Prentice said: "The Post Office as we know it today will be unrecognisable in five years time if the Tories win a fifth term. The Conservative manifesto makes that clear. It boasts that a Tory Government, if re-elected, would consider *"different forms of privatisation"* for our Post Office."

"Last time only a national campaign spearheaded by Labour kept the Post Office in public hands. The Tories had not even included the privatisation plans in their manifesto. But that didn't stop John Major trying to steamroller through the sell-off in 1994. He

only reluctantly shelved the scheme when told he would not get it through the Commons. This time nothing would stop them."

"Tory plans to break up and sell off our Post Office would have a dramatic impact on community life in Pendle. Our local post offices are more than just shops. They are a vital social service."

"Privatisation will lead to prices going up, deliveries being cut and small post offices facing closure. This will particularly affect those who live in Pendle's villages, where there are no banks and public transport is not what it used to be. Our Post Office is an international success story. Our European neighbours envy its efficiency and its performance. Only a Tory party driven by dogma would consider breaking it up and selling it off."

"The Post Office should be given commercial freedom to develop services. But it should stay where it belongs - providing a public service."

For Immediate Release. No 151/97 Saturday 19 April 1997

PRENTICE SAYS ELECTION IS ABOUT HOPE vs. FEAR

The man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice, told an election meeting in Nelson on Friday evening (18 April) that the vote on May 1st was a contest between hope and fear.

The Labour candidate said the Conservatives were raising the spectre of fewer jobs under a Labour Government. Yet they had deliberately used unemployment as a tool of economic management, costing the nation billions. He said Norman Lamont when Chancellor had famously said that *"unemployment was a price well worth paying".*

Prentice said: "Unemployment when Labour left office in 1979 was far too high at 1.3 million but under the Tories it has soared to over 3 million - and that's on their fiddled figures."

"The Tories are trying to scare people into believing a Labour Government would cost them their jobs. It takes a brass neck to say that after what has happened to this area in recent years."

Also on the platform was Referendum candidate Damian Hockney and Lib Dem candidate Tony Greaves. The Conservative hopeful, John Midgley, declined to attend or send a stand in. The meeting

was chaired by the Revd Sally Thomas on behalf of the Pendle Inter Faith Group.

For Immediate Release. No 152/97 Mon 21 April 1997

PRENTICE OFFERS A DATE FOR BARLICK ELECTION HUSTINGS - WITH OR WITHOUT THE TORY

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, has asked the respected independent Barlicker, Colin Pollard, to chair an election meeting at 7.30pm on Tuesday 29 April at Rainhall Road County Primary School.

Prentice said today an election meeting should be held in West Craven - with or without the Conservative Westminster hopeful, John Midgley. The would-be Tory MP declined to attend a meeting organised by the Barnoldswick Council of Churches saying the Colne meeting was enough for the entire constituency. The hustings, pencilled in for April 18 was cancelled.

Speaking from his home in Barnoldswick this morning, Prentice said: "I have spoken today to Colin Pollard who has agreed to take the chair. I am in touch with the other candidates and I am keeping my fingers crossed everyone can make it along to this meeting."

"Before approaching Colin Pollard, I asked the Barlick Council of Churches if it would try, for a second time, to organise a meeting involving all the candidates. Unfortunately, it was not possible and I wasn't going to press the point. No-one wants to put the local clergy in a difficult position."

Prentice added: "The voters in West Craven should have an opportunity to quiz all the candidates who aspire to represent Pendle in Parliament. I am happy to be judged on my record as the area's MP for the past five years."

For Immediate Release. No 153/97 Sunday 20 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: Gordon Prentice will be visiting Euravia in Kelbrook at 2pm on Monday 21 April 1997.

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, will be visiting Euravia, the Kelbrook based aero engine

company. He will be chatting to Managing Director, Dennis Mendoros, and the people working there about the firm's plans for the future.

Contact Gordon Prentice on 0941 111249 (pager) or 01282 695471

For Immediate Release. No 154/97 Sunday 20 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE SPEAKING TO THE LOCAL BRANCH OF THE NFU at the Alma Inn, Laneshawbridge at 8pm on Tuesday 22 April 1997.

Gordon Prentice, a member of the Agriculture Select Committee in the last Parliament, will be speaking to the local branch of the National Farmers Union about Labour's policies for agriculture and the food industry..

For Immediate Release. No 155/97 Mon 21 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE DISCUSSING PLANS FOR THE NEW LOWER PARK MARINA WITH TERRY HORAN, WATERWAY MANAGER FOR BRITISH WATERWAYS at 3.30pm on Wednesday 23 April at Lower Park Marina, Barnoldswick

Gordon Prentice is a keen supporter of inland waterways. He says the Leeds & Liverpool canal is one of the area's greatest assets. A number of improvements have been made to the canal in this area including the proposed new marina, towpath improvements between Barrowford and Greenberfield, boat facilities and new moorings at Foulridge, new banking and moorings at Salterforth.

According to British Waterways usage by walkers and cyclists has increased by 500%.

For Immediate Release. No 156/97 Mon 21 April 1997

GRAMMAR SCHOOL MADNESS IN PENDLE

The man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice, today asked his Conservative challenger to name which one of Pendle's comprehensive schools will become the area's grammar school if the Tories are returned for a fifth term. The Conservative manifesto promises to *"help schools to become*

grammar schools in every major town where parents want that choice".

Prentice continued: "It is as plain as a pikestaff that one grammar school in Pendle will mean the others will become, de facto, secondary moderns. The Tories have been telling parents for years that they, the parents, have the right to choose the school for their son or daughter. They don't. They can express a preference. That's all."

"Conservative policy is a con. The "grammar school in every town" plan means more failing schools and more children getting a second class education. Grammar schools for the few means worse off secondary moderns for the many."

"The proposals would allow parents to force school governors to ballot on changing to grammar school status. It would lead to a return of the 11 plus, condemning 9 out of 10 children to secondary moderns."

Note to Editors: There are 160 grammar schools in the country out of a total of 4,000 secondary schools. Under a Labour Government, any change to their status would require the agreement of local parents in a ballot.

For Immediate Release. No 157/97 Tuesday 22 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING THE PRECISION ENGINEERING FIRM, WESTONS, at STATION ROAD, FOULRIDGE at 11am on Wednesday 23 April.

The man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP will be meeting Geoffrey Sutton and the rest of the team at Westons, tomorrow.

For Immediate Release. No 158/97 Tuesday 22 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE WILL BE VISITING THE ECROYD TRAINING CENTRE, GIBFIELD ROAD, COLNE at 2pm on Wednesday 23 April 1997.

An incoming Labour Government will be putting education and training at the top of the agenda. The man bidding for a second

term as Pendle's MP will be meeting the staff and clients at Gibfield Road.

For Immediate Release. No 159/97 Thurs 24 April 1997

PRENTICE HAILS DECISION OF FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE NFU TO VOTE LABOUR

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, has welcomed the decision by former President of the National Farmers' Union, Simon Gourlay, to vote Labour in next week's poll.

Gourlay, who was the Farmers' president from 1986-91, wrote in today's Times that the *"Government's lack of positive policies for agriculture has proved disastrous for framers and consumers alike."*

Mr Prentice who was a member of the Agriculture Select Committee in the last Parliament said Mr Gourlay was voicing a widely held view that the Tories had forfeited the trust of the farming community.

On Tuesday, the Labour candidate addressed the Nelson and Colne Branch of the NFU at the Alma Inn, Laneshawbridge. Speaking afterwards, Prentice said: "It was a good, lively meeting. I am getting a lot of support from local farmers".

Note to Editors: Mr Gourlay's letter to the Times today reads: Over the last few years the effect of the Government's lack of positive policies for agriculture has proved disastrous for farmers and consumers alike.

This has been most painfully demonstrated in the BSE crisis, the most important issue for British agriculture since the Second World War. Ineptitude and day-to-day crisis management over the past ten years have cost farmers and the taxpayer billions of pounds, and yet the whole of the beef industry is still reeling.

In Europe the Government has failed even more abjectly. The ban on the export of beef is still in place despite the Prime Minister's promises that it would be lifted by November last year. Six months on there has been

more follows

PRENTICE HAILS DECISION OF FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE NFU TO VOTE LABOUR

absolutely no progress in lifting the ban and in the meantime imports of
beef from Germany and Holland (where they now also have BSE) are ruining our domestic market.

I believe that through these failures the Conservatives have forfeited the right of the support of the farming community. Labour, with its clear and constructive proposals (recently published in Reforming the Common Agricultural Policy) and its commitment to an effective, independent Food Standards Agency, presents us with an opportunity to regain terra firms. We should take it.

For Immediate Release. No 160/97 Wed 23 April 1997

PRENTICE PINS BLAME FOR BSE CATASTROPHE ON THE TORIES

The BSE crisis which has cost the nation £3.5 billion will be one of the most poisonous legacies of the Conservative Government according to Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP.

He told a meeting of local farmers last night that BSE had damaged the reputation of British farming and agriculture in a way that nothing else had this century.

"The way the Government handled the BSE crisis was crass and incompetent. Last June the Prime Minister went to Florence and agreed to the famous five conditions which would leave to the lifting of the ban last November. The Government prevaricated the conditions were not met and we still have a world wide beef ban."

Prentice added: "An incoming Labour Government will waste no time and spare no effort in getting the ban lifted."

Turning to other issues, Prentice told the farmers from the Nelson and Colne Branch of the NFU that Labour wanted a thriving and living countryside and one where the environment was properly protected. He promised reform of the "hugely wasteful" Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries policy.

He said: "Our fish should never have been regarded as a common resource of all the other Community countries. The mistake was made at the very beginning when the Conservative Government gave away our fish stocks."

For Immediate Release. No 161/97 Thurs 24 April 1997

SEVEN DAYS TO GO

A week is a long time in politics - but for many people the election campaign will start today says Labour's Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from his Campaign HQ earlier today, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP said local people would be making their choice over the next seven days about who they want to lead Britain in the next five years and into the next century.

Prentice said: "The choice is between 22 tax rises and more to come under the Tories or Labour cutting VAT on fuel and introducing a 10p starting rate of tax. It is between the end of the NHS as we know it under the Tories or Labour saving the NHS with more patients treated, shorter waiting lists and red tape slashed."

"It is between more failing schools and a return to the 11 plus under the Tories or Labour bringing smaller class sizes and raising standards in every school. It is between more violent crime and a failure to deal with guns and knives under the Tories or Labour bringing faster punishment for persistent young offenders and a strategy to deal with crime and its causes."

"It is between more people trapped on social security under the Tories or Labour getting 250,000 unemployed people off benefit and into work. It is between a feeble, divided and corrupt Conservative Party and a new, energetic and forward looking Labour Party."

"I am not complacent about the result but I am encouraged by the polls which show the Tories failing to make any ground. The reception I'm getting on the doorstep is very warm and positive."

For Immediate Release. No 162/97 Friday 25 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: PRENTICE TAKES TO THE ROAD

Labour's road show in Pendle gets moving tomorrow with a multi-vehicle cavalcade led by a double decker bus, garlanded in bunting, posters and balloons.

A state of the art sound system will grab shoppers' attention with the Party's campaign song from D: Ream: *"Things can only get better!"*

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, said: "Our battle bus - which is not on hire from Stagecoach! - will take Labour's message into every nook and cranny of the constituency."

"The support we are getting is absolutely marvellous!"

Note to Editors: Bus in Barnoldswick 10.30am (Leo's car park) Earby 11.15am (near bus station). Colne 12.15pm off Craddock Road.. Brierfield Community Centre 1.30pm. Nelson from 2.15pm

For Immediate Release. No 163/97 Mon 28 April 1997

PRENTICE TURNS HIS IRE ON TORY

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, has ridiculed his Conservative challenger, John Midgley, who has snubbed - for a second time - the voters in West Craven by refusing to attend an all-party election meeting tomorrow night in Barnoldswick.

The Barlick hustings which will be held at 7.30pm at Rainhall Road County Primary School will be chaired by the respected independent Barlicker, Colin Pollard. The Liberal Democrat, Tony Greaves, who is running for Parliament and the County Council, says he will turn up and so too will Damian Hockney, the Referendum Party candidate.

Gordon Prentice commented: "Mr Midgley is cocking a snook at the people of West Craven. He is ignoring them while asking for their votes. My predecessor, the former Conservative MP, John Lee, would never have passed up the chance to share an election platform with me."

"Mr Midgley's behaviour is deeply disappointing."

For Immediate Release. No 164/97 Friday 25 April 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE AT THE PENDLE SCHOOLS FESTIVAL, Colne Municipal Hall on Saturday 26th April at 7pm.

The man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, Gordon Prentice, will be attending the "Massed Music Night" at Colne Municipal Hall tomorrow, Saturday, 26 April, at 7pm.

The week long 37th Festival has featured dance, gymnastic, drama and music performances and art/craft displays provided by local primary and secondary schools.

For Immediate Release. No 165/97 Friday 25 April 1997

PRENTICE TAKES THE BISCUIT

Gordon Prentice will be following in the footsteps of prominent Conservative Ministers when he visits Farmhouse Biscuits next Wednesday (30 April) at 2pm.

On 7 April the company hosted a visit from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Roger Freeman, and the Conservative Westminster hopeful, John Midgley. Previous visitors from the world of politics have included former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

Gordon Prentice, the man bidding for a second term as Pendle's MP, said: "These visits gave me food for thought. I am interested in food policy as a member of the Agriculture Select Committee in the last Parliament and I thought it was about time I visited this well known local company."

"I am glad Mr McIvor, the managing director, has managed to fit me in before polling day!"

Note to Editors: Farmhouse Biscuits is at Brook Street Mill, Brook Street, Nelson.

For Immediate Release. No 166/97 Mon 28 April 1997

PRENTICE SLAMS YOBS

The youths who attacked head teacher, Gerry McCabe, after he challenged for tearing down a Labour poster, were described today as “ignorant yobs” by Gordon Prentice, the man bidding to win a second term as Pendle's MP.

Prentice said: "Gerry has a broken nose and two black eyes as a result of this vicious attack by a cowardly bunch of ignorant yobs.”

He added: "I hope the police catch them and get them hauled up before the courts in double quick time.”

“This kind of totally unprovoked brutal assault needs to be dealt with severely. I don’t want to hear any excuses from the people who did this.”

For Immediate Release. No 167/97 Tues 6 May 1997

MP “STAGGERED” BY HUGE MARGIN OF VICTORY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has confessed he was staggered at the scale of last Thursday’s General Election win. The man who was bidding for a second term as the area’s MP romped home with a majority of 10,824 - the largest ever in the Pendle seat and in Nelson and Colne before it. The MP’s majority in 1992 was a fifth of that - 2,113.

Speaking to Party workers in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: “Last Thursday’s election was a watershed for the nation. The political landscape has been transformed beyond all recognition. People are expecting big things from this new Labour Government and we shall be working night and day to deliver.”

“Tomorrow (Wednesday) I shall be in London attending the first meeting of the new Parliamentary Labour Party. It is now so big there is not a room big enough for us to meet in the Palace of Westminster. Instead, we shall be meeting in the Grand Hall of the Institute of Civil Engineers in Great Smith Street, Westminster. This fact in itself is quite remarkable.”

“The next five years will be exiting and memorable as we roll up our sleeves and get to work. There is so much to be done.”

Note to Editors: The result

Gordon Prentice (Labour)	25,059	(53.28%)
John Midgley (Conservative)	14,235	(30.26%)
Tony Greaves (Liberal Democrat)	5,460	(11.61%)
Damian Hockney (Referendum)	2,281	(4.85%)

Majority 10,824 (Majority in 1992: 2,113)

For Immediate Release. No 168/97 Wednesday 7 May 1997

PRENTICE HAILS RE-ELECTION OF SPEAKER BETTY BOOTHROYD

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today said he was thrilled to bits by the re-election, without a vote, of Betty Boothroyd to the Speaker's chair. The Speaker has connections with Pendle having contested the old Nelson and Colne constituency in the by-election in June 1968 caused by the death of Sydney Silverman. The seat was taken by David Waddington.

Speaking from Westminster this afternoon, the Pendle MP said: "It has been a truly remarkable day. The House of Commons looks different and feels very different. After my five years as an MP in opposition, it is a strange sensation sitting on the Government side of the House. Betty will have her work cut out simply remembering all the new faces and putting names to them all. Even I will have to do some homework as the North West Group of Labour MPs which I chair is now the largest regional grouping in the House."

"The first meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party this morning was another historic occasion. We had to meet in the Conference centre at Church House next to Westminster Abbey as there were no rooms big enough for us in the Palace of Westminster."

"The Queen's Speech next Wednesday which will lay out the new legislative programme will give us plenty of work to do."

For Immediate Release. No 169/97 Tues 20 May 1997

MP PLEDGES BILL TO OUTLAW ONE DAY SALES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today pledged that he would bring in a Bill to ban one day sales if he is successful in the annual ballot for Private Members' Bills. He says his experience of these sales over the past few years has convinced him the law needs tightening up.

The MP's most recent clash with the organisers of a one day sale was on Sunday 16 February at the Marsden Community Centre. The Torquay based organisers of the sale were forced to abandon the event after the intervention of the furious MP and four Labour councillors. Dozens of people turned up for the 7pm sale, tempted by offers of Hitachi TVs and other expensive electrical goods at knock down prices.

At the time, the MP told people waiting outside to be on their guard. He said the organisers - Table Top Sales - were just like Table Top Marketing who came to the Great Marsden Hotel in October 1995 and ripped people off, "selling shoddy goods for inflated prices."

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "I am keeping my fingers crossed that I come at or near the top of the ballot. I have been promising myself for years that I would finally nail these fraudsters once and for all. Without exception, they are out to trick, con and deceive. They are cheats who prey on good honest folk who think they are on to a bargain."

Only MPs who come top of the ballot stand a chance of seeing their Bill become law. The result of the ballot will be declared at 1pm on Thursday 22 May.

For Immediate Release. No 170/97 Tues 20 May 1997

GOVERNMENT ORDERS REVIEW OF DENTAL COVER

The new Labour Government has moved swiftly to review the adequacy of dental cover across England. Health Minister, Alan Milburn, told local MP, Gordon Prentice, that the provision in Pendle and in next door Burnley would be high on the agenda.

The Minister was replying to the Pendle MP in this afternoon's Health Questions in the Commons - the first in the new Parliament. The MP wanted to know what the Government would be doing to increase the number of NHS dentists.

Prentice told the Minister the dental health of children in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale was the worst in England and the number of dentists was declining. He said: “In Barnoldswick, where I live, there should be at least four dentists. At the moment there are two and soon we will be down to one. And the one that is remaining, Paul Hadfield, announced on 7 April that he would no longer be taking on new NHS adult patients.”

“Try as he would wish to, the Shadow Health Secretary (Stephen Dorrell) can hardly blame the new Government for this appalling situation.”

He added that the Conservatives had created a “dental desert” in East Lancashire.

Speaking afterwards, the Pendle MP said: “The new Government has the bit between its teeth on this one. No-one pretends things can be sorted out over night but it comes as a tremendous relief to know we have a Government which acknowledges the scale of the problem and is prepared to do something about it.”

For Immediate Release. No 171/97 Wed 21 May 1997

PRENTICE APPOINTED PPS TO TRANSPORT MINISTER

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has been appointed PPS (Parliamentary Private Secretary) to Cabinet Minister, Dr Gavin Strang, who holds the transport brief in the new Labour Government.

The MP, who paid his first visit earlier today to the Department’s Marsham Street HQ, commented: “I am delighted to be working with Gavin and the rest of the transport team. The Government will be addressing an enormous number of important issues - finding new solutions to old problems.”

“It is very exciting.”

For Immediate Release. No 172/97 Tues 20 May 1997

HOWARD “DOES VERBAL GYMNASTICS” WITH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLAIMS PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, last night intervened in the bitter war of words between former Home Secretary, Michael Howard, and his former Prisons Minister, Anne Widdecombe.

The two Conservative MPs engaged in a public duel in the Commons over the circumstances surrounding the dismissal of Derek Lewis, the former Director General of the Prison Service, and the fate of the Governor of Parkhurst, John Marriott following the widely publicised breakouts from the top security prison.

The former Home Secretary maintained that there was a distinction between operational matters and policy and that he did not order Lewis to discipline John Marriott.

In the Commons clash last night, the Pendle backbencher asked Howard: "When is an instruction not an instruction? At your meeting on 10 October 1995 you said *"John Marriott cannot continue as governor... I can't conceive of a clearer case for suspension."* Was that advice or was it an instruction?" Howard told the Pendle MP that he, Howard, was entitled to express a view but he did not tell the former Director General what to do.

Speaking today, Prentice said: "As Anne Widdecombe said, Michael Howard takes refuge in semantics. We now have the transcripts of the Home Office meetings which have been released by Jack Straw. It is as plain as a pikestaff that Michael Howard left no room for doubt as to what he expected to see happen. This episode must have blown his Tory leadership chances to smithereens."

For Immediate Release. No 173/97 Wed 21 May 1997

STAGECOACH SAVAGED BY MP

The bus company Stagecoach was this afternoon savaged by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, in the first Prime Minister's Questions session of the new Parliament.

The MP asked the Prime Minister if he appreciated the outrage and indignation felt by bus passengers in East Lancashire who had been left high and dry by the company as services were cut back.

He told the PM fares were rising and services were totally unreliable and that it was a "shaming indictment" of the previous Government that regional bus monopolies had been created which took no account of the public interest.

Speaking afterwards, the Pendle MP said: "The PM recognised some regulation of the buses is necessary if the kind of abuses we are seeing from Stagecoach are to be prevented in future."

"Press reports in the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* this week tell horror stories of appallingly unreliable services; of drivers leaving in droves; of fares increasing and school children being stranded at bus stops as the buses fail to turn up."

"The Tories allowed Stagecoach to get away with blue murder."

For Immediate Release. No 174/97 Wed 21 May 1997

PRENTICE HAILS LANDMINE BAN

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has hailed the announcement today by the Prime Minister Tony Blair that Britain will ban anti-personal landmines. He said it was the right and the civilised thing to do.

The Pendle MP said: "I have been waiting for this announcement for years. My colleague, Eric Illsley, told the PM an estimated 120 million anti-personnel landmines were planted around the world - killing or maiming someone every 20 minutes. What an appalling legacy of war and conflict."

"The ban will involve the import and export and manufacture of anti-personnel landmines."

The MP, not usually known for his royal sympathies, added: "Princess Diana was right to speak out against these dreadful weapons which kill and maim indiscriminately. She took a lot of stick from Tory backwoodsmen."

"I have little doubt she will be as pleased as the rest of us."

For Immediate Release. No 175/97 Thursday 22 May 1997

PRENTICE WELCOMES EARLY MOVE ON NURSERY EDUCATION

The Government's announcement today that the nursery voucher scheme is to be axed from the end of the summer term this year has been welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "People want us to get cracking on this vital issue of nursery education. I know that today's initiative will be widely welcomed in Pendle. As a first step, I want to see all four years olds in Pendle offered nursery education where their parents want it."

The Government also published today its Bill to reduce class sizes.

Note to Editors: The Table below shows the percentage of children in nursery education in Lancashire in each year since 1992

Year	% of children in nursery education in Lancashire
1992	18
1993	19
1994	21
1995	21
1996	21

Participation rates for all children under five in maintained nursery and primary schools in Lancashire

Year	% of children under 5 in maintained nursery and primary schools in Lancashire
1992	50
1993	52
1994	53
1995	54
1996	54

For Immediate Release. No 176/97 Tues 27 May 1997

MP HOPES FOR PROGRESS ON KASHMIR TALKS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is hoping for a breakthrough at talks next month between India and Pakistan over the future of

Kashmir. During last month's General Election the MP pledged that Kashmir would be at the top of the foreign policy agenda of an incoming Labour Government.

On Sunday, the Pakistan Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan announced that the next round of talks involving officials will be held in Islamabad on June 19-22. They mark the resumption of the talks stared in March in New Delhi after a break of three years.

The Pendle MP said: "The dispute over Kashmir has triggered two of the three wars between Pakistan and India since independence in 1947. Both these countries are nuclear powers and no-one wants Kashmir to be the flash point for another conflagration."

"I want to see a plebiscite in Kashmir to allow the people of that country to decide their own future."

For Immediate Release. No 177/97 Tues 27 May 1997

NEW FIGURES SHOW EXTENT OF LOW PAY IN PENDLE

Pendle's place as one of the nation's low pay blackspots has been confirmed by local MP, Gordon Prentice. He says the number of local people earning less than £3.00; £3.50p and £4.00 an hour is significantly higher than the Lancashire average. The County is already regarded as a low wage area.

Speaking from his constituency office in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: "The national minimum wage cannot come too soon so far as many of my constituents are concerned. The percentage of part-timers in Pendle earning less than £3 an hour is way above the Lancashire figure. The same is true for those earning less than £3.50p."

"We all want the new Low Pay Commission to get cracking. We can never compete in the modern world by relying on low skills and low wages. That is not the future for Pendle or for Britain."

Note to Editors: Percentage of employees with hourly earnings (excluding overtime) less than:

	£3.00	£3.50	£4.00
Pendle			

Full-time	1.5	8.1	14.0
Part-time	11.1	27.8	30.6
All	3.5	12.2	17.4
Lancashire			
Full-time	1.6	5.7	11.0
Part-time	7.5	23.2	37.3
All	3.0	9.8	17.1

source: Office of National Statistics. New Earnings Survey April 96

For Immediate Release. No 178/97 **Wed 28 May 1997**

PENDLE SCOOPS DUCHY CASH

Pendle folk have benefited most from cash awards from the Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund during the past year. The Fund distributes cash from the estates of people who have died in Lancashire without leaving a will. The money goes to the Queen (as Duke of Lancaster) rather than to the Exchequer which is the case elsewhere.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has taken a close interest in Duchy matters since he was first elected in 1992. He has a Commons question down to the new Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (David Clark MP) next Wednesday, a week today.

Commenting on the latest figures, the Pendle MP said: “I am obviously heartened that Pendle did so well last year but the whole set up is a strange medieval curiosity. No-one really knows how the Benevolent Fund decides who is going to get what.”

“In 1996 Pendle people put in more applications than anywhere else but our strike rate wasn’t too good. Only 6 were successful. This compares with Preston where 11 out of 13 applications were successful. In 1995, more donations were made to Pendle groups than in previous years. The sums involved are modest but that is not the point. I would like the new Chancellor to review the whole system.”

The MP kicked up a storm in 1994 when he discovered the amount of money going to Pendle was much less than comparable areas. He campaigned relentlessly to get people to apply for the cash that was available.

Note to Editors: Last year, the MP urges local groups to bid for Duchy cash. The Benevolent Fund of the Duchy of Lancaster - which distributes money from the estates of those who die within the boundaries of the old

PENDLE SCOOPS DUCHY CASH

County of Lancashire without making a will - gave £200 to a young person in Earby in 1995. They also gave £400 to Mansfield High School; £450 to Barnoldswick Park Rovers FC; £1,000 to Pendle Duke of Edinburgh's Award Team and £500 to Colne Parish Church. In 1994 Burnley and Pendle Greenspace received £400 and £250 went to a Nelson woman who is handicapped. Grants to Pendle people in 1993 amounted to £714 - £150 to an invalid in Colne, £500 to a handicapped person in Barnoldswick and £64 to another handicapped person in Barnoldswick. In 1994 the Pendle MP persuaded the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to reverse a decision of the Duchy's Benevolent Fund not to grant aid the Lancashire Free Legal Advice Centre who needed money to buy updates for their law library.

The history of the Duchy of Lancaster goes back to the 13th century. Since 1399 this estate passed to each reigning monarch with the Duchy revenues providing a source of income separate from other Crown inheritances. This separate identity was preserved when in 1760 George III surrendered the revenue from the Crown Estates to the Government in exchange for the Civil List but retained the Duchy of Lancaster revenues.

Note 2 to Editors: The Table shows the number of applications for assistance in the year to 31 March 1997 and amount donated

Local Authority area	Applications received	Successful applications	Total donated £
Blackburn	6	3	1,087
Blackpool	8	4	1,900
Burnley	17	9	3,650
Chorley	5	2	500
Fylde	3	3	150
Hyndburn	4	4	950
Lancaster	12	6	575
Pendle	**18**	**6**	**3,870**
Preston	13	11	2,708
Ribble Valley	7	5	2,200
Rossendale	7	5	1,600
South Ribble	6	4	911
West Lancashire	3	2	100

Wyre	3	2	803
County-wide	5	2	1,836
		Total	22,840

In addition the following major projects were supported:

Local Authority area	total donated	recipient
Preston	5,000	Parish prospect
Preston	5,000	St Walburge's
Blackburn	5,000	Cathedral Tower
Blackburn	5,000	New Direction Training
Fylde	5,000	Youth Information and Advice Centre
Total	25,000	

For Immediate Release. No 179/97 Thursday 29 May 1997

MP BACKS MINISTER'S MOVE TO MEET GULF VETERANS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the decision yesterday by the new Defence Minister George Robertson to meet Gulf War veterans. He says the Government will look at claims by many former servicemen that they are suffering from Gulf War Syndrome.

Speaking from Barnoldswick earlier today, the MP said: "The Gulf veterans were given tea and sympathy by the previous Government. Some would say they didn't even get that. It must be right for the new Government to look at the claims afresh and actually meet the veterans - something which astonishingly hasn't happened so far."

"Like many MPs, I have come across harrowing tales from servicemen and their families about what happened in the Gulf. We owe an obligation to these former soldiers to ensure they are treated fairly."

The Government plans new research into the causes of Gulf War Syndrome. Investigations to date suggest immunisations designed to protect the soldiers from chemical or biological warfare agents could be to blame. Another theory points to the use of pesticides.

For Immediate Release. No 180/97 Thursday 29 May 1997

MP SLAMS CAMELOT PAY RISE

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice has hit out at the "jackpot pay rises" awarded by the directors of Camelot to themselves.

The MP said: "These people have hit the jackpot without the bother of buying a lottery ticket. We should have a people's lottery but instead it is just a licence to print money for the operators. I can understand the Prime Minister's outrage at what is happening."

Camelot's directors had pay increases of nearly 40% in the last year at a time when contributions to good causes fell by £143 million. Payments to ten Camelot directors rose from £1.67 million to £2.32 million. Total sales of National Lottery tickets in the year to March 31 were £4.7 billion - 10% down on 1996. Camelot's pre-tax profits dropped 8.6% to £70.8 million.

Heritage Secretary Chris Smith is to meet Camelot chairman Sir George Russell this afternoon.

Note to Editors: Almost a year ago (4 June 96) Prentice clashed with the then Prime Minister, John Major, over the huge profits being run up by the lottery organisers, Camelot. In the Commons the Pendle MP asked the Prime Minister: “Isn’t it the case that after tax profits of £1 million a week and bonuses of £100,000 to the directors of Camelot are quite unacceptable. Surely every pound that goes in profit is a pound less for good causes? Shouldn’t the lottery be run on a non-profit basis giving more money to good causes and less to the fat cats.”

For Immediate Release. No 181/97 Mon 2 June 1997

MP TO VISIT AMBULANCE HQ

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet Lancashire Ambulance Service Chief Executive, David Hill, the coming Friday (6 June) at 12 noon at his Preston HQ to discuss recent developments affecting the service. The MP last visited the nerve centre in 1995 following deep concerns about local ambulance cover in Pendle.

The MP said: "Some big changes were made to the service two years ago and I felt it was time for me to have another in depth

look at things. It is a statement of the obvious to say that ambulances can mean the difference between life and death."

"I am looking forward to hearing more about plans for making further improvements to the service."

Note to Editors: Cover is provided for the Pendle area from Burnley, Barnoldswick and Nelson Ambulance Stations with primary back-up from Clitheroe and Altham Ambulance Stations and secondary back up from Accrington.

For Immediate Release. No 182/97 Mon 2 June 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE WITCHES GALORE SHOP IN NEWCHURCH AT 5PM ON FRIDAY, 6 JUNE 1997

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be making the first draw of the village lottery at the Witches Galore Shop on Friday 5th June at 5pm.

The lottery is to raise money for the village and the surrounding area and will be used to celebrate the millennium.

For Immediate Release. No 183/97 Mon 2 June 1997

SACRED HEART RC CHURCH CENTENARY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be joining Fr. Tubman and the parishioners of the Sacred Heart Church, Queen Street, Colne for Mass this Friday (6 June) at 7.30pm to celebrate the centenary of the Church.

For Immediate Release. No 184/97 Tues 10 May 1997

COLNE FOULRIDGE BYPASS INQUIRY SET FOR 5 AUGUST

The public inquiry into the controversial Colne Foulridge Bypass has been set for 5 August and Lancashire County Council is sending letters confirming the date to all interested parties. Local

MP, Gordon Prentice, told villagers in Kelbrook on 14 February that he would give evidence at the Inquiry after taking extensive soundings from local people.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "I sought to have the inquiry postponed for a few months to allow people to assess the impact of the M65/M6 link up in November. Unfortunately, that was not legally possible so will be all have to rely on projections and "guesstimates" from the County Council about the future volume of traffic."

"The inquiry raises important issues which have an importance beyond Pendle."

For Immediate Release. No 185/97 Tues 10 May 1997

GOVERNMENT TO MOVE AHEAD ON ACCESS TO LAND

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today welcomed news that the Government is to publish a consultation paper this summer on access to the countryside. Confirmation of the plan was given to the Commons this afternoon by Environment Minister Michael Meacher.

The Minister told the House the principle of access was "non negotiable" but the Government would consult on the "how".

Speaking from Westminster after the announcement, the Pendle MP, a keen hill walker, said: "There is nothing for farmers and landowners to worry about but a great deal to celebrate. For far too long people have been kept out of open and uncultivated land simply by virtue of its ownership. That is no longer acceptable."

"There will of course be proper safeguards and the Government will want to give everyone an opportunity to express his or her opinion before settling the details of the legislation. But, at the end of the day, there will be a right of access to land."

The MP added: "Ramblers and hill walkers are not the kind of people who will wantonly disrupt the life of the countryside. That is a caricature."

"We will be giving new rights but there will be corresponding responsibilities too."

For Immediate Release. No 186/97 Wed 4 June 1997

PRENTICE WELCOMES END OF POLITICAL GONGS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today welcomed the news that Prime Minister Tony Blair is to end the practice of awarding knighthoods and damehoods to politicians. The outgoing Prime Minister's honours list will be the last to contain these honours.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: "This is a breath of fresh air which will blow through the corridors of Westminster."

"In the last Parliament, every other Tory MP had been knighted for so called "political services". Scores of Conservative backbenchers of decades standing felt the light touch of the royal sword on their shoulder which, in their eyes, magically lifted them above the common herd."

"The whole thing is demeaning and totally absurd."

"The Prime Minister's move will be widely welcomed not just in the Labour Party but in the country too."

For Immediate Release. No 188/97 Thurs 5 June 1997

PRENTICE BACKS KEY ROLE FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the new role for Further Education set out yesterday by Education and Employment Minister Baroness Blackstone at the Annual Conference in Bristol of the Association of Principals of Colleges.

The Minister said that Further Education had a vital part to play right at the centre of the education agenda. She said the new Government was determined to raise its profile.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP commented: "The Minister is saying what we all want to hear especially in Pendle where we faced so many difficulties earlier this year. The new Government is working urgently on the detailed design of the New

Deal, which sets out a range of options for 18 - 24 year olds who have been unemployed for over six months. Clearly, colleges will have a part to play in equipping some of our most educationally disadvantaged young people with the skills to help them gain and retain jobs."

The MP added: "Lifelong Learning is to be the focus of a White Paper planned for the autumn. We all need to learn throughout life. The idea that we learn everything there is to know by the time we leave formal education is absurd. We need to develop our skills all the time."

The Government will soon be seeking views from TECs, LEAs, colleges, employers and learners themselves.

For Immediate Release. No 188/97 Tuesday 10 June 1997

MP WELCOMES MOVE TO BRING IN TOTAL HANDGUN BAN

The private ownership of handguns could be banned outright if legislation to be introduced to the Commons tomorrow gets through. There will be a free vote on the second reading of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "This Bill will ban all handguns including the .22 calibre ones which were left uncontrolled by the previous Government."

"We would not forgive ourselves if we did nothing and there was another Dunblane or another Hungerford. There will always be unbalanced and crazed individuals out there determined to harm others but we can cut the risks by making the private ownership of handguns illegal."

"I shall be voting for a complete ban."

Last year the MP met some of the parents of the children massacred at Dunblane when they presented their snowdrop petition at Westminster. At the time he said he hardly knew what to say to them. He said their lives had been devastated by the actions of a crazed gun fanatic.

Note to Editors: In August last year, the MP condemned the key recommendation of the leaked report of the House of Commons

Home Affairs Select Committee. By a majority of one, the Committee said the banning of hand guns would be impractical. Six Tory MPs voted against a ban. Five Labour voted for.

For Immediate Release. No 189/97 Tuesday 10 June 1997

COLNE/FOULRIDGE BYPASS PUBLIC INQUIRY TO BE DELAYED AS COUNTY BIDS FOR PFI MEGA SCHEME

The Public Inquiry into the controversial Colne Foulridge Bypass which was set for 5 August is likely to be postponed following a re-think by Lancashire County Council.

The County's Highways and Transportation Committee meets tomorrow (Wednesday) to consider a recommendation by the County Surveyor to delay the Inquiry and press on with a new £33m bypass running the entire length of the route from Colne to Broughton on the A59 near Skipton. The cash would come from the private sector under the PFI (Private Finance Initiative).

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This really is back to the drawing board stuff. The County wants to yoke together the Westgate scheme in Burnley with the Colne/A59 bypass on the grounds that the bigger the scheme the more likely it is to attract private finance."

"We need to know what precisely is being proposed and we need information on the costs and alleged benefits. Are we talking about a modest single carriageway relief road or a second strategic corridor into Yorkshire?"

"I am told the County does not have information on the present and projected travel patterns for people living in Pendle. Getting this together must obviously be a top priority."

Last month, the MP called for the postponement of the Public Inquiry for a few months to allow people to assess the impact of the M65/M6 link up in November.

For Immediate Release. No 190/97 Wednesday 11 June 1997

PRENTICE CALLS TIME ON TIMESHARE TOUTS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says it's time to call time on the timeshare touts. He is backing Nigel Griffiths, Minister for Consumer Affairs, who is publishing a Timeshare Guide to give holiday-makers travelling to European Countries clear cut advice on how to stay out of the clutches of the timeshare touts.

The Pendle MP said: "I've dealt with some pretty nasty cases where local people have been conned by timeshare operators. As we approach the holidays I say people should watch out for the timeshare touts. These people know every trick in the book, they are sharks, they are unscrupulous operators who will stop at nothing to sell you a timeshare youπ probably never even considered buying and probably can't afford."

"Most of the complaints relate to Spain and its islands and the Minister will be writing to the Spanish authorities about this."

"If you are approached my advice is this. Take time to think. Don't be rushed. Never sign anything to get away from a sales team. Insist on full details in writing."

Notes to Editors A European Union Timeshare Directive (Directive 94/47/EC) was adopted on 26 October 1994. It provides the right to a cooling off period of at least 10 days across the EU, together with a contractually enforceable information brochure.

2 In the UK, the Directive has been implemented by the Timeshare Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/1081). The Regulations amend the Timeshare Act 1992, which provided those buying timeshare in the UK or under UK law with the protection of a 14 day cooling off period. The 14 day period is retained while consumers receive the additional protection of the Directive. The Timeshare Guide is available by calling 0171-510 0174 and quoting URN/97/643.

For Immediate Release. No 191/97 Wednesday 11 June 1997

MP WARNS OF DRUGS MENACE

The number of people convicted of dealing in controlled drugs within Lancashire has shot up since 1992. The figures were released by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, earlier today.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "The war against drugs has got to be energetic and unrelenting. Here in Lancashire we have seen a big increase in recent years in the number of convictions of people dealing in drugs."

"There is going to be no let up."

Note to Editors: Number of persons convicted within the Lancashire Police Force area for specific drug offences 1992-95

Offence	1992	1993	1994	1995
Production of a controlled drug	25	26	42	46
Supplying a controlled drug	72	54	73	117
Possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply	92	80	115	160
Possession of a controlled drug	444	295	380	618

For Immediate Release. No 192/97 Wednesday 11 June 1997

MP LISTS ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE NEW LABOUR GOVERNMENT

Members of the Pendle Labour Party will soon be getting a taste of what it means for their party to be in Government after 18 years. This Friday (13 June) the area's Labour MP, Gordon Prentice, will be telling local party workers at a special meeting in Nelson what it feels like to be running the country!

The MP will say: "In less than six weeks Labour has changed the direction, feel and pace of Government. There is new energy, new hope and new direction. We have already embarked on an ambitious legislative programme including two education Bills, one to cut class sizes by phasing out the assisted places scheme, the other to raise standards in schools."

"There is also a welfare to work finance Bill including a one-off windfall levy on the excess profits of the privatised utilities. We also intend to allow local authorities to release capital receipts from the sale of council homes for investment in building new houses and refurbishing old ones. A Bill to ban all hand guns in private ownership received its first reading in the Commons this week."

"We have also begun abolishing the NHS internal market, switching the first £10m in savings to reduce the amount of time women have to wait for breast cancer treatment. We have taken new action on literacy, shifting £300,000 from the grant maintained schools foundation to literacy summer schools for under-achieving 11 year olds."

"We have introduced a Bill to devolve power to Scotland and Wales. We have lifted the ban on trade unions at GCHQ. We have announced we shall ban tobacco advertising. We have held a

MP LISTS ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE NEW LABOUR GOVERNMENT

water summit to force water companies such as North West water and Yorkshire Water to take action on leaks. We have embarked on a strategic defence review. We have banned the manufacture and export of landmines."

"These are just some of the things we have done in the few short weeks since our election. But there is more, much more, to be done."

"Our new Labour Government is changing the face of Britain and the very nature of our politics."

"It is exhilarating."

For Immediate Release. No 193/97 Thursday 12 June 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS FIGURES AT NEW LOW

The unemployment figures for Pendle for May - the first returns under the new Labour Government - show a big fall in local unemployment from 1,611 (4.3%) in April to 1,463 (3.9%) in May.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "The continuing fall in the number of jobless people is very welcome but we need to look behind the bald figures."

"Under the previous Government the unemployment figures were fiddled over thirty times and we are looking at the methodology. We want statistics that are robust and reliable."

For Immediate Release. No 194/97 Friday 13 June 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE PENDLE HERITAGE CENTRE, TODAY, FRIDAY 13 JUNE at 11.30am.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting the Pendle Heritage Centre today at 11.30am to learn more about future plans. The MP will be having lunch with the Centre's staff.

For Immediate Release. No 195/97 Monday 16 June 1997

PRENTICE PLEDGES NHS CARE WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ALL, ACCORDING TO NEED AND FREE AT THE POINT OF USE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has ridiculed suggestions that the Labour Government's review of the NHS will threaten the core principle that treatment is free and available at the point of use. A storm blew up last week when it was rumoured the Health Secretary was preparing to abandon this central principle.

Speaking from Westminster, Gordon Prentice said: "We are undertaking a comprehensive spending review of the health service and, as we set out in our manifesto, there is no question of the Government doing anything to breach the fundamental principle of the NHS that health care will be available to all, according to need, free at the point of use."

"The comprehensive spending review will of course look at every

aspect of health service funding. I know from my own experience in Pendle that many aspects of the NHS need looking at and that is precisely what will be happening. But to suggest this is some machiavellian threat to the NHS is preposterous."

Note to Editors: In a speech to the Institute of Health Service Managers conference in Cardiff last Wednesday, Alan Langlands, Chief Executive of the NHS said: "The new Government's manifesto was unequivocal in its commitment to the principle of universality. It says " that if you are ill or injured there will be a national health service there to help; and access to it will be based on need and need alone - not on your ability to pay, or on who your GP happens to be or on where you live." This is an important stake in the ground - it will be the starting point for judging how well the money is being spent in the NHS, for considering future resource requirements and for tackling the central and departmental spending reviews which were trailed in the manifesto."

For Immediate Release. No 196/97 Monday 16 June 1997

MP BACKS BID TO BAN FOX HUNTING

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the decision by the new Labour MP for Worcester, Michael Foster, to introduce a Private Member's Bill to ban fox hunting. The Worcester MP came top of the ballot for Private Members Bills.

The Pendle MP said: "I say well done to Michael for having the courage of his convictions. The hunting lobby will set up a hue and cry about this one. It will be all sound and fury signifying nothing. I shall be voting to ban fox hunting."

Labour's policy is to allow a free vote of this issue.

Note to Editors: The RSPCA has stated (in 1995 briefing) that • 75 per cent of people thought fox-hunting with hounds should be made illegal. • 83 per cent thought stag hunting should be made illegal. • 80 per cent thought hare coursing should be made illegal.

What about pest foxes?
The best protection from predators for livestock such as free-range poultry is effective fencing. The RSPCA believes that, above all, humane methods should be used to control pest foxes. Where there is a proven problem, shooting at close range by a skilled shot is far more humane than the random pursuit and savaging by dogs of any fox which happens to be in the vicinity of the hunt. You do not have to declare war on a whole species because of individual fox problems. The problem of fox predation is frequently overstated, and the vast majority of lambs losses are due to cold, exposure and poor management - not foxes. The best scientific estimates suggest that lamb losses to foxes are less than one lamb per sheep farm per year, compared to 23 per year from other causes (cold, still births, starvation, accidents etc.).

Do many foxes suffer injuries at the hands of inaccurate shooting? There is little evidence that this is more than a rare occurrence. One can never guard against individuals recklessly injuring animals, but out of 1,693 sick and injured foxes collected by the RSPCA only one case was reported to have pellet injuries.

more follows:
FOX HUNTING

Does fox-hunting conserve hedgerows and coverts?

There is a mistaken belief that many hedgerows are maintained to serve as obstacles for the hunt, and that small woodlands are maintained to provide sites for foxes to live and breed. Farmers are encouraged by Government to maintain hedgerows for the good of the countryside. The presence of organised hunting is completely unconnected. In a survey of 3,700 landowners (1), 'fox covert' was the least common reason given for retaining and planting small woods. There is no reason to believe that a ban on hunting would lead to the destruction of such features.

Can stag hunting with hounds be justified to conserve deer numbers?

No. There are far more humane methods available. Culling of deer numbers is best done by a skilled marksman to minimise suffering. In Scotland, where stag hunting with hounds is banned, the deer population is managed by shooting. The cruelty of stag hunting is compounded in that

the season (August to April) covers the period when many hinds are pregnant or have young with them.

Doesn't fox-hunting with hounds ensure a quick kill?

First the chase is often lengthy. Stress alone _ causes suffering, and both horses and hounds can be injured in the course of the chase. The dogs will fight with the fox upon capture, with dogs disembowelling the fox by tearing open its underbelly. The image of one hound killing the fox instantly with a single bite to the neck is a myth. Also, many foxes are driven to ground followed by terriers trained to corner the fox or drive it from cover. Only then it is killed.

Wouldn't fox numbers escalate if fox hunting with hounds was made illegal?

No. The total number of foxes killed by organised hunts is relatively small compared to the fox population. A recent Parliamentary answer suggested that about 12,500 foxes are killed by hunts, compared to 100,000 killed by other means such as shooting(2). Naturally, the fox population will peak at about half a million in the summer months, and fall to half that figure in the winter. Fox numbers are largely self regulating, influenced like all wildlife by weather conditions, food supply and other natural factors. Indeed, the random killing of foxes and dispersal of family groups brings non-breeding vixens into breeding, thereby increasing numbers. Evidence suggests that fox populations can recover extremely quickly from losses as great as 70 per cent; the population being totally restored within one year. The evidence that organised hunting controls the fox population by killing significant numbers is not justified. Organised hunting with hounds remains an irrelevance in terms of pest control.

For Immediate Release. No 197/97 Tuesday 17 June 1997

MP WELCOMES DECISION TO BASE HOUSING INVESTMENT ON NEED

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed news that the allocation of resources to local authorities for housing investment is to be changed so that fifty per cent is based on need and fifty per cent on discretion. The announcement was made by Housing Minister Hilary Armstrong yesterday.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP aid: "In Pendle we have the third oldest housing stock in England and much of it is in a terrible state of repair. We also have one of the highest levels of home ownership in the country but Pendle is a low wage blackspot and a lot of people simply don't have the money to keep their homes in a good state of repair."

Note to Editors: The Housing Investment Programme (HIP), previously run on a fully discretionary basis, provides local authorities with resources to improve housing stock through capital programmes, as well as providing for private sector renewal and disabled facilities grants.

The guidance (issued yesterday) sets out the timetable for the 1997 Programme. Local authorities are not being asked to produce a strategy statement, but will add to the information provided for the 1996 round. HIP is a system for allocating resources to local authorities for capital investment in housing. Each local authority is allocated an Annual Capital Guideline (ACG) for general housing purposes as well as guideline allocations for Private Sector Renewal and Disabled Facilities Grant.

Resources are allocated in stages. First, at regional level resources are distributed in accordance with needs indicators. Second, each regional total is allocated to individual local authorities on the basis of 50 per cent need and 50 per cent discretion. The indicators used in the allocation of ACGs is the Generalised Needs Index. For private sector renewal allocations, the formula is based on the number of unfit dwellings, with account taken of cost to make fit and ability to pay. For disabled facilities allocations, account is taken of the distribution and ability to pay of elderly and disabled people.

For Immediate Release. No 198/97 Monday 16 June 1997

PRENTICE HAILS ROLLS ROYCE ENGINES ORDER

The announcement last Friday (13 June) that an international consortium involving Rolls Royce is to supply V2500 engines for British Midland's new fleet of twenty Airbus planes has been hailed as a great success by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The company's Barnoldswick plant in Pendle makes fan blades for aero engines and is a big local employer.

The consortium - International Aero Engines - includes Rolls Royce, Pratt and Whitney, Japanese Aero Engines Corporation and MTU Daimler Benz. British Midland's order for twenty Airbus A320s and A321s is the largest order made by a British airline for Airbus, with the first planes due for delivery in spring 1998.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "This is very good news indeed. Rolls Royce is a leading player in the consortium."

Note to Editors: British Midland's new Airbus aircraft will have the V2500 engine. The industry accounts for 1.7% of UK manufacturing output.

For Immediate Release. No 199/97 Tuesday 17 June 1997

MP WELCOMES MOVE TO ALLOW COUNCILS TO USE THEIR "CASH IN THE BANK"

Councils will soon be allowed to spend the money they have accumulated from the sale of councils houses and other assets if legislation to be introduced in the Commons goes through. The Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill is to be given its second reading in the Commons this afternoon. Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says the move is long overdue.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today the MP said: "It was a national scandal that the previous Government told councils to sit on this enormous pile of their own cash rather than spend it on much needed housing improvements."

The MP added: "Allowing councils to spend their own money on a sensible, phased basis will give the construction industry a real shot in the arm."

"My own council in Pendle has about £5 million in capital receipts which it is not at present allowed to spend."

For Immediate Release. No 200/97 Thursday 19 June 1997

GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS OVER CEMENT MANUFACTURE

The Government has responded to the Environment Select Committee report into the environmental; impact of cement manufacture. The Committee's report was published before the General Election on 7 March.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "There has been tremendous interest in this whole issue because of the controversial decision by Castle Cement over in Clitheroe to burn Cemfuel. This has been a long running saga and I have taken a close interest in the issue. Indeed, I had an adjournment debate to highlight concerns on 20 March last year."

The Pendle MP's colleague, Environment Minister Michael Meacher, told Parliament yesterday that the new Labour Government expected the Environment Agency to be a fair and rigorous regulator of industry which fully protects public health and the environment.

The Government response addressed the Committee's conclusions and recommendations relating to policy on pollution control, planning, waste management and health issues. It also comments on the Committees criticism of the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency has issued its own response, which deals with the majority of the Committees recommendations, concerning the Agency's enforcement role.

The Minister said: "The Government has welcomed the Select Committee's careful consideration of this issue and sees the report as a very valuable contribution to public debate, not only on this important subject, but also on broader issues of environmental protection."
more follows:

CEMENT MANUFACTURE

"The Governments response affirms its commitment to regulation of industry to prevent harm to human health and minimise impacts on the environment as a whole. The Committee has made a number of trenchant criticisms of the Environment Agency's regulation of the cement industry. In particular it found inadequacies in the Agency's public consultation

procedures, lack of consistency in application of environmental standards and deficiencies in the regulation of Castle Cements Clitheroe works."

"The Government is deeply concerned that the Committee should have felt it necessary to make such criticisms. The Environment Agency has accepted the Committees criticism and responded to it positively, with an extensive plan of action designed to bring about better public consultation, improve research and guidance and contribute to further studies of the health effects of pollutants."

"I have made clear in discussions with the Agency that the Government expects it to be a fair and rigorous regulator in all its dealings with industry. It must set appropriate standards which fully protect public health and the environment, and then enforce then firmly."

"The Agency's management has assured me that it is committed to the changes which are needed to ensure that industrial pollution is controlled in a manner which will command the full confidence of Parliament and the public. I can assure Members of this House that I intend to hold the Agency to that promise."

The Pendle MP added: "The Government's response will be widely welcomed."

For Immediate Release. No 201/97 Thursday 19 June 1997

MP SLAMS "GROTESQUE" SET ASIDE

The set- aside system which compensates farmers for not growing crops was today described as "grotesque and utterly indefensible" by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

In the Commons this afternoon, the MP told Agriculture Minister Jeff Rooker that farmers and "grain barons" were getting thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money for doing nothing while hill farmers, by contrast, had to eke out a meagre living.

The MP told the House: "There is a compelling case for getting rid of set aside and production subsidies and instead use the resources freed up to support the countryside and protect the environment."

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "The Common Agricultural Policy is an absolute disaster. Huge set aside payments are quite obscene."

Note to Editors: In the last Parliament the Guardian (14 August 1995) reported that six Conservative Ministers who owned large farms benefited from the scheme. The paper cited Lord Inglewood getting £136,000, Earl Ferrers £140,000, Earl Howe £85,000 and Tim Boswell MP, Sir Nicholas Bonsor (no longer an MP) and David Heathcote-Amory.

For Immediate Release. No 202/97 Friday 20 June 1997

PRENTICE BACKS BEER BILL

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing Dennis Turner's Private Members Bill which will mean that beer drinkers will get a full liquid measure, even for beers that are customarily served with a significant "head" comprising a mixture of gas and liquid.

The Wolverhampton Labour MP Dennis Turner came in the top ten of the annual ballot and his Bill stands a good chance of becoming law.

The Pendle MP commented: "People have a right to get what they pay for. That is the long and the short of it. A recent survey by CAMRA showed that 8 out of 10 pints weren't pints at all and that 1 in 4 pints fell below even the 95% liquid target recommended in the industry's guidelines."

His colleague, Consumer Affairs Minister Nigel Griffiths, added: "Down the years I have received many complaints from consumers and Trading Standards Officers who have frequently reported short measures, in contravention even of the industry's own Guidance Notes. When the consumer asks for a pint and is charged for a pint, that is the quantity that he should be served."

Note to Editors: The Bill is the Weights and Measures (Beer and Cider) Bill. It will provide that, when measuring the quantity of beer or cider, the gas comprised in any foam shall be disregarded. This will mean that full liquid pints of draught beer and cider must be provided in addition to the gas in any froth on the head.

Court decisions found that, depending on local preferences and the
type of beer sold, the foam on top of the liquid in a glass of beer is to be included in the amount purported to be supplied.

To remedy this and ensure that beer drinkers received full measure, Section 19 of the Weights and Measures Act 1979 (subsequently consolidated as section 43 of the Weights and Measures Act 1985) provided that the gas

PRENTICE BACKS BEER BILL

contained in the froth should always be disregarded for determining whether the purported quantity had been supplied. No appointed date was fixed for section 43 to come into force.

In December 1991, Mr Leigh, the then Consumer Affairs Minister, announced that he planned to bring section 43 into force. In March 1992 he announced that he had made a Commencement Order which appointed 1 April 1994 as the date for section 43 to come into force.

In October 1993 Mr McLoughlin (DTI PUSS for Trade and Technology) announced that he had made an Order revoking the Commencement Order. He said that the Government intended to repeal section 43 as soon as Parliamentary time permitted. Section 43 was repealed by the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

The Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association's Guidance Notes on the Dispense of Draught Beer by Free Flow and Hand Pull advise that a head of froth is unreasonable if a measure of draught beer does not contain a minimum of 95% liquid after the collapse of the head.

On 11 March 1997 CAMRA published the results of its national survey on short measure pints. CAMRA had written to every Trading Standards Department in the country asking for details of their surveys of local pubs.

For Immediate Release. No 203/97 Friday 20 June 1997

PLANNING CONTROLS OVER GARDEN EXTENSIONS SET TO STAY

Labour Ministers are withdrawing a proposal by the previous Government to remove the existing planning controls on the extension of household gardens.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This is a sensible decision by the new Government. A consultation paper was issued last November on a proposal that householders should in future be able to extend their gardens onto adjacent land without needing to submit a planning application. This was another hare brained Tory proposal with very little support outside their ranks. The Government received 425 replies. 361 expressed opposition and only 34 offered support."

"Many people were concerned about the impact of the proposal on open countryside and on the Green Belt in particular. No sensible person wants to see creeping "sub urbanisation" of our countryside."

The MP added: "We have some beautiful open countryside here in Pendle and we are on the doorstep of outstanding landscapes."

For Immediate Release. No 204/97 Friday 20 June 1997

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES ROADS REVIEW

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says the far reaching and broadly based strategic Roads Review announced yesterday by the Minister for Transport, Gavin Strang, gives everyone an opportunity to stop for breath and take stock. Prentice says the roads programme needs to be put under the microscope to ensure the benefits of any new road construction outweigh the costs.

The Pendle MP who is Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Transport Minister commented: "We don't need to stay on the road building treadmill. We can get off if we wish. The review will allow us to look at the role of road travel alongside other methods of travel such as rail. There will be a consultation paper next month inviting comments by October and we shall be publishing our White Paper on the Integrated Transport Strategy next Spring."

Note to Editors: The Review will look afresh at the environmental impact of roads and take into account work on

developing an integrated transport policy, including issues such as whether steps should be taken to manage demand for travel by road, and, if so, what means should be used; and the extent to which we should encourage the use of other modes of transport. The review will also consider the role of technology and improved information systems; and the impact which investment in roads could have on regional development.

In a written PQ on 19 June the Transport Minister told Alan Whitehead (Lab - Southampton Test) how he proposes to discharge the manifesto commitment to carry out a strategic review of the roads programme. The Minister said: "I am today launching the Roads Review. The objective of the Review will be to determine the role which roads should play in an integrated transport policy and to establish a forward investment programme for the trunk road network in England.

The Review will be broadly based. Unlike reviews carried out by the previous Government, it will not merely consider what road schemes should be added to or deleted from the trunk roads programme. It will look afresh at the environmental impact of roads and take into account parallel

work on developing an integrated transport policy for the UK which my Rt Hon Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced recently, including, in particular, work on issues such as whether steps should be taken to manage demand for travel by road, and if so, what means should be used; and, the extent to which we should encourage the use of other modes of transport. It will also consider the role which new technology and improved information systems can play; and the impact which investment in roads could have on regional development. The Roads Review, work on an integrated transport policy and the comprehensive spending review will be very closely co-ordinated.

We intend to consult widely during the course of the Review. During the next few weeks my Department will be consulting key representative bodies both about the range of issues which need to be covered and how we might involve them effectively in the Review. We then intend to launch a public consultation in July, inviting responses by the end of October. We would particularly value contributions from the Regional Planning Conferences, local authorities and other regional bodies. We shall consider in due course what arrangements will be appropriate for continuing regional consultations on trunk road planning beyond the

Review, taking account of the comments received in response to the previous Government's proposal to bring trunk roads within the Regional Planning Guidance system.

We hope to announce the conclusions of the Review next Spring. In the interim the Highways Agency will continue to take forward maintenance work, small safety schemes, and two re-signing projects in line with existing plans. Schemes on which construction is already well advanced will continue, but preparatory work on new major schemes will be put on hold at the end of the current stage, except in the relatively few cases in which some procedural step needs to be taken to ensure that work done to date is not lost should we ultimately decide that the scheme should be taken forward. Work on developer funded schemes will also continue as these schemes either have been or will be scrutinised thoroughly in the appropriate planning processes and they are generally small improvements which do not have any wider strategic significance.

There are also 12 cases on which urgent decisions are pending. We therefore propose to carry out an accelerated review of these cases against the criteria of accessibility, safety, economy and environmental impact and announce our decisions on them in July. It may be that in some of these cases we decide in July that a decision cannot be taken in advance of the main Review. In the majority of cases we will take a decision either to take the scheme forward or to abandon it.

The cases in question are: •Birmingham Northern Relief Road (BNRR) •M25 Junctions 12-15 •M66 Denton- Middleton Contract 3 •A2/M2 Cobham J4 widening •Salisbury Bypass/Wessex Link DBFO •A564 Derby Southern Bypass Contract B •Weald and Downland DBFO •Cumbria Bradford DBFO •South Midlands Network DBFO •A40 West London Approach DBFO •A13 Thames Gateway DBFO •M62E/M606 Link Roads.

For Immediate Release. No 205/97 Friday 19 June 1997

GOVERNMENT SAYS COUNCILS CAN SPEND THEIR OWN CASH!

Government proposals on how resources under the Capital Receipts Initiative can best be used for those in housing need were published today. Local MP Gordon Prentice hailed the move

as a giant step forward in allowing local councils the freedom of manoeuvre to help tackle their housing problems.

The proposals, which take account of receipts from the sale of council houses and of housing need in each English local authority
area, are set out in a consultation paper issued today by Housing Minister Hilary Armstrong.

Ms Armstrong said: "We have today sent out a consultation paper to all local authorities in England. That paper sets out our proposals for the distribution of any additional spending between local authorities. We wish to ensure that spending generated under a receipts initiative will be directed towards priority housing needs. Capital receipts themselves, however, have not always been generated in the areas of greatest need. Some authorities have generated significant volumes of receipts but have relatively low needs. Others have had little or no scope to generate significant receipts, yet have particularly high needs. We are, therefore, proposing that resources should be allocated on the basis of one third according to the proportion of eligible set-aside receipts and the remaining two thirds in accordance with assessed need."

"The paper also sets out our objectives for spending. Our intention is that the resources will be targeted on housing and housing-related regeneration schemes. We, therefore, wish to ensure that local authorities: integrate the additional spending into their

more follows

housing strategies; plan for badly needed repairs to dilapidated stock and support new provision where it is needed."

Local MP Gordon Prentice added: "We also want this initiative to help get our young people into work."

Note to Editors: The Chancellor, will announce the amount of additional resources that will be available for 1997/98 and 1998/99 in the Summer budget.. The Bill's proposals: The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 prevents Ministers from taking account of any set-aside capital receipts which are held by a local authority when issuing Supplementary Credit Approvals (SCAs) (see Note 3 below). Under the Local Government

(Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill, it is proposed that Ministers would be able to take account of any set-aside capital receipts which may be held by a local authority, as well as other factors such as an authority's housing need, when issuing SCAs.

SET-ASIDE CAPITAL RECEIPTS: Under the 1989 Act, local authorities have been required to set aside a specified proportion of most types of capital receipts raised from the sale of assets (such as council houses, land, redundant buildings etc.). The proportion of receipts to be set aside is laid down by regulation for different types of assets - currently 75% of the proceeds of housing assets and 50% of the proceeds of the sale of other assets.

An authority's set-aside capital receipts can be used to repay debts or pay off credit arrangements. Until they are used, the set-aside capital receipts are generally held in approved investments or invested internally by being used as an alternative to short term borrowing. However if an authority is debt-free it may use its capital receipts as it wishes.

Since 1990 when the Act came into force, the sale of council housing assets has resulted in some £5 billion of capital receipts being set aside by local authorities. These receipts and a proportion of the receipts from other asset sales have been used for the repayment of debt and credit arrangements where appropriate.

SUPPLEMENTARY CREDIT APPROVALS: A credit approval is the means by which the Secretary of State allows a local authority to borrow or to use its set aside capital receipts to pay for capital expenditure (ie. expenditure on assets such as buildings, land, vehicles etc).

The Government is proposing to issue supplementary credit approvals rather than simply to release set aside capital receipts because by using this mechanism they can target resources on those areas where need for investment in housing is greatest. (The proposal is to allocate one third of additional spending on the basis of the amount

of set-aside capital receipts an authority has, and the remaining two
thirds on the basis of its housing need).

For Immediate Release. No 206/97 Tuesday 24 June 1997

INDEPENDENT FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY "NOW ON THE HORIZON" SAYS PENDLE MP

Plans to set up a new Independent Food Standards Agency are well under way according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster as the formal consultation period on the proposed new agency closed. A White Paper is to be published in the Autumn and a summary of the responses to the consultation will be out next month.

The Pendle MP said: "I have taken a close interest in food policy issues after the dreadful series of food catastrophes we have had. The words E Coli, salmonella and listeria have now unfortunately entered common English usage. In my own constituency last December we have an outbreak of e coli which struck down a number of people though none to long lasting effect. It is as plain as a pikestaff that an independent agency is long overdue."

In the Government consultation, 456 organisations ranging from environmental health departments, food manufacturers and retailers, consumer bodies, health authorities, academia, voluntary and environmental groups and individual members of the public have commented on the proposals for a Food Standards Agency.

The response to the consultation paper showed the extent to which a lack of openness and transparency lay behind the concerns over existing arrangements and that there is universal agreement that we should reform arrangements for food safety.

Notes to Editor: The Ministerial Group on Food Safety was announced by the Prime Minister on May 8 1997, at the time of publication of Professor Philip James' Report into the establishment of an independent Food Standards Agency.

For Immediate Release. No 207/97 Thursday 26 June 1997

PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP

Friday 27 June at West Craven Swimming Pool, Barnoldswick. At 1.30pm the local MP will be handing over a certificate to Mrs H.L. Edwards of Salterforth who has completed a five mile sponsored swim for the Lancashire Ambulance Service.

Saturday 28 June at Sacred Heart Primary School, Red Lane, Colne. At 12 noon the MP will be raising the flag to mark the school's long term commitment to environmental education. The school has received an award from Eco School.

Sunday 29 June at Nelson Cricket Club. The MP will be enjoying the match with Lord Hoyle and Len Dole.

For Immediate Release. No 208/97 Thursday 26 June 1997

PENDLE MP WELCOMES BUS REVIEW

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the Government's "bus review" announced yesterday by Transport Minister Gavin Strang. The review is part of the development of an integrated transport policy.

The Pendle MP commented: "Here in Pendle we know a lot about bus deregulation now that Stagecoach is in the driving seat. After years of chaos on the roads and confusion over policy, this review will allow us plan the best way forward."

The review will look at all aspects of buses including:

- the scope for more effective use of bus priority measures, coupled as necessary with traffic restraint;

- better arrangements for passenger information and ticketing, including inter-modal travel;

- regulatory and other measures to improve the quality of bus services, including through the "quality partnership" approach between operators and local authorities.

In addition, the review will address financial issues such as costs and support for the industry.

Announcing the review to a conference of bus operators in London, Dr Strang said: "Its purpose is to examine how buses can best play their part in an integrated transport policy. Our aim is to see increased use of the bus as a means of reducing congestion and pollution, particularly by attracting motorists from their cars.

"I intend to consult fully with the industry, local authorities, bus

more follows

users and other interest groups, building on the joint work that has previously been done in this area. The results of the review will form part of the proposed White Paper next Spring on integrated transport policy."

Dr Strang said there had been positive developments in recent years, but more needed to be done if buses were to play a greater role in meeting transport needs and reducing dependence on the car. The aim, he said, must be to develop ways of making bus services more efficient, reliable, frequent, clean and safe:

"This may mean asking how best practice can be encouraged and adopted more widely. It may mean looking again at enforcement strategies, so that investment in bus priority measures yields the payback that it should. It has to involve improvements to public transport to encourage people to make less use of their cars."

Dr Strang said that options for regulating the bus industry would be considered against these objectives and the extent to which they would deliver improvements in key areas such as passenger information and ticketing, service frequency and reliability, and greater stability in the market. The Government, said Dr Strang, had an open mind on the options and was not necessarily wedded to a single blueprint.

For Immediate Release. No 209/97 Monday 23 June 1997

PENDLE MP TAKES HIS BONES FOR A WALK

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be "taking his bones for a walk" at 12 noon tomorrow, Tuesday 24 June, in support of World Osteoporosis Day.

The MP will be walking from Victoria Tower Gardens, over Lambeth Bridge and along to Archbishops Park where he will take a calcium rich refreshment to build up his bones.

The MP commented: "When it comes to chit chat about health matters, bones, I believe, are relatively neglected. But where would we be without them!"

"I want to see research given a boost in this vital area and I also want to back those people such as the National Osteoporosis Society who keep telling us to watch our diet."

Note to Editors: The National Osteoporosis Society writes: Osteoporosis is a major public health problem in the UK, destroying the lives of over three million sufferers and their families. One in three women and one in twelve men are at risk of the disease. Osteoporosis causes more than 200,000 fractures each year, causes permanent disability, sometimes chronic pain and can seriously reduce a sufferer's quality of life. Osteoporosis costs the NHS more than £740 million a year and results in 40 premature deaths a day. Taking regular exercise helps, so does a calcium rich diet and in women hormone replacement therapy at the menopause can be particularly effective

For Immediate Release. No 210/97 Monday 23 June 1997

PRENTICE BACKS BID BY EDGE END TO CREATE A NEW EAST LANCASHIRE CRICKET COACHING CENTRE

A top level meeting at Westminster today heard details of the planned cricket coaching centre at Pendle's Edge End High School. A bid for lottery cash is being pushed by the headmaster, Martin Burgess, school governors and a team of experts from Cheshire - the Pownall Partnership of Wilmslow.

Mr Burgess and his advisers met Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, and his Burnley colleague, Peter Pike, over lunch at the Commons to plot how best they could take the project forward.

Speaking afterwards, Gordon Prentice commented: "This is a very exciting proposal that has been worked up and Peter and I want to do everything we can to make sure it succeeds. It will be a regional centre of excellence for cricket."

"The idea is for the new centre to be used by the school all year round with facilities open in the summer months to the general public. The school wants to co-operate with Pendle Borough Council to organise an indoor football league, basketball competitions, badminton and indoor hockey."

The MP added: "I very much hope that my local council will be able to help in a practical way to get this project off the ground. I shall be speaking to the Council to see what it can do."

For Immediate Release. No 211/97 Monday 23 June 1997

PRENTICE REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO CREATE STRATEGIC RAIL AUTHORITY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said today that the creation of a Strategic Rail Authority was a priority to ensure proper public accountability of the railway system. It will feature as part of the integrated transport policy - the shape of which is to be set out in the White Paper promised for next spring.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: "Even though the railways have been privatised they still receive an enormous amount of public subsidy - over £2 billion for this year alone. The taxpayer has every right to expect that this money is put to good use and the spending is monitored for effectiveness."

"Here in the North West we have seen the results of under investment by the previous Government. The West Coast Main Line is the poor country cousin of the East Coast Main Line. We have to make sure the investment is put in place now to give us a rail system fit for the 21st century."

"I shall be meeting Railtrack shortly to discuss progress on the West Coast Main Line."

Note to Editors: Both the Franchise Director and the Rail Regulator

have expressed dissatisfaction with the powers and sanctions they have available to enforce standards.

For Immediate Release. No 212/97 Monday 23 June 1997

PRENTICE "APPALLED" BY RESUMPTION IN IVORY TRADE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said today he was appalled by the resumption in the trade in ivory agreed at the conference in Harare last week which had been called to discuss the trade in endangered species.

The new Labour Government has said it will continue to oppose any resumption in the trade in ivory until there are adequate safeguards in place. However, the majority of nations represented at the Conference supported an immediate resumption in trade in ivory without adequate controls. The proposals for downlisting elephants were accepted by a two thirds majority of the Conference but, in an important development, they also accepted additional controls which were promoted by the UK and proposed by the EU."

The Pendle MP said: "Unless there are rigorous controls, policed by the international community, there is a great danger of poached ivory getting into the system - not just the tons of stockpiled ivory. No-one wants the majestic elephant to go the way of the dodo."

Note to Editors: if trade does then resume, the stockpiles will be exported only to Japan in a one-off experiment which would be reviewed. Quotas would be limited to those agreed by the Conference. These amount to 59 tonnes altogether - 12 per cent of the estimated ivory stockpile in Africa.

For Immediate Release. No 213/97 Monday 23 June 1997

GOVERNMENT STOPS HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has backed the decision of Social Security Secretary, Harriet Harman, not to go ahead with the planned restrictions on Housing Benefit for single people aged over 25. The Minister wrote to all Local Authority Chief Executives last week telling them of her decision.

The Pendle MP commented: "Before the last election we said we would review the regulations which extend the Single Room Rent to people aged 25 or over. These limit Housing Benefit to the average market rent for a single non-self-contained room. I am glad the Minister has decided to shelve the plan."

Notes for Editors: 1. Housing Benefit is an income-related benefit which helps people on low incomes with their housing costs. It can pay up
to 100 percent of rent, depending on the claimant's circumstances. It is administered by local authorities on behalf of the DSS. It does not cover mortgage costs, which can in some cases be met by Income Support.

2. There have been a number of changes to Housing Benefit for people living in the private rented sector over the last 18 months:

* for all new claimants since January 1996 benefit has been linked to "average" local rents. This "local reference rent" is calculated by the rent officer service. Claimants with higher rents receive 50 percent of the difference between the local reference rent and the actual rent;

* since October 1996, the rent for most single people under 25 has been based on the average rent for basic single-room accommodation, with no 50 percent top up.

3. The extension of the Single Room Rent to those aged 25 or over was due to come into effect on 6 October 1997.

For Immediate Release. No 214/97 Monday 23 June 1997

MP STEPS INTO TRAWDEN CONTROVERSY

The furore triggered by proposals to build new housing in Trawden took a fresh turn at the weekend when scores of villagers assembled outside the MP's Saturday morning surgery in Trawden. They turned out in force to make the MP aware of the strength of feeling.

Villagers say the character of Trawden will be changed if the new housing goes ahead and that the local infrastructure would not

cope. The point in particular to the local primary which would be bursting at the seams if the new housing goes ahead. They say Trawden could soon become a suburb of Colne.

A public meeting has been called for tonight by the council leader, Alan Davies, and other Liberal Democrat councillors.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "I hope some clarity comes out of the meeting this evening. When the deputation of villagers came to see me on Saturday, I heard many complaints about lack of consultation. No-one seemed to know what was being proposed until it was too late. People in Trawden need to know what happened and why and what remedy is available to them."

The MP added: "I am in touch with the Council to get chapter and verse about the whole thing."

"People in Trawden are clearly very upset. I have never known anything like it."

For Immediate Release. No 215/97 Wednesday 25 June 1997

MP PLEDGES TO ROOT OUT PRESCRIPTION FRAUD

A new Report by the NHS Executive has revealed that the NHS is losing around £100 million each year through prescription fraud - that is around £1 million per health authority. Commenting on the report from Westminster, local MP Gordon Prentice said: "We need to root out the fraudsters and get that money working for patients in Pendle. That's why I'm backing the Government's war against the prescription fraudsters."

The MP added: "Prescriptions are a vital part of NHS care and the people who are exploiting the system are not only cheating taxpayers in Pendle they are depriving patients in Pendle of the care that they need. For example, if our Health Authority was able to spend an extra £1 million on patient care, the Authority could carry out an extra 145 heart bypass operations, or an extra 689 cataract operations or an extra 222 hip replacements or an extra 65 kidney transplants."

"The Government has announced a new war to combat prescription fraud. We shall be improving prescription form security by incorporating, for the first time in the history of the NHS, anti-theft and anti-counterfeiting devices in their printing. There will be a reward scheme for pharmacies which detect stolen or counterfeited prescription forms."

"In addition, the Government is developing proposals for a new criminal offence of evading payment of the prescription charge and for a fixed penalty for non-payment. We are also examining the costs and benefits of an electronic data interchange (EDI) system for transferring prescription information. This will bring long term benefits for the prevention of both patient and contractor fraud."

For Immediate Release. No 216/97 Tuesday 24 June 1997

PRENTICE SLAMS HAGUE'S 'TAINTED CASH'

The £20,000 cash gift from mortgage broker David Steene to the Leader of the Opposition, William Hague, to finance his leadership campaign was described today as "tainted money" by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: "It has emerged from a report in the Daily Mail today that William Hague's leadership campaign was funded by David Steene, Managing Director of City Mortgage Corporation, which charges punitive rates to people who can't get mortgages elsewhere."

"I want to hear from anyone in Pendle who has had a bad experience with this dreadful company with its appalling track record."

The MP added: "Recent events have cast doubt on the judgement of the new Tory leader. He formed his kitchen cabinet by appointing Alan Duncan as his PPS. This is the same Alan Duncan who had been forced to resign from his job in the Tory Government after putting up the money to allow his neighbour to buy his council house in Westminster's exclusive Lord North Street at a knock-down price. The agreement allowed for the house to pass to Duncan after his elderly neighbour's death."

"This is hardly an auspicious start."

For Immediate Release. No 217/97 Thursday 26 June 1997

PENDLE MP CALLS FOR DEBATE ON LAW OF PERJURY

The law of perjury should be reviewed according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He told the President of the Council (Ann Taylor MP) at Business Questions in the Commons this afternoon that an early debate was required to test opinion on whether sentences were tough enough to deter those tempted to perjure themselves and pervert the course of justice.

The Minister said she would make the Home Secretary aware of the MP's views.

Speaking after the exchange, the Pendle MP said: "Since 1979 hundreds upon hundreds of people have been convicted of perjury yet the longest term of imprisonment given for this very serious offence was just five years - in 1987 and again in 1989."

"It is alleged that the former Cabinet Minister and former Privy Counsellor, Jonathan Aitken, lied on oath during his recent libel case against the Guardian and Granada Television. If he had won the case he would most likely have received very substantial damages indeed given his elevated position in the establishment."

"As we all know, the case collapsed when Aitken was presented with new evidence showing his wife could not have paid the hotel bill at the Paris Ritz as he had maintained."

"So far as I am concerned disgraced former Cabinet Ministers should have the same status in the eyes of the law as the rest of us. The law of perjury applies to us all equally or it is not worth having on the statute book."

The police are currently investigating the allegations.
Table follows overleaf showing convictions for perjury 1979-1995

Note to Editors: Number of persons prosecuted at Magistrates' Courts and convicted at all courts for offences of perjury 1979-1995 (England and Wales)

Year	Prosecuted	Convicted
1979	149	135
1980	158	174
1981	146	145
1982	148	131

1983	147	139
1984	161	186
1985	166	162
1986	124	124
1987	183	167
1988	220	203
1989	226	195
1990	176	160
1991	217	166
1992	212	164
1993	198	150
1994	198	144
1995	232	193

source Parliamentary Answer to the Pendle MP (Thursday 26 June 1997)

For Immediate Release. No 218/97 Wednesday 2 July 1997

DON'T BUY SOUVENIRS THAT ENDANGER WILDLIFE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves to save wildlife threatened with extinction. Yesterday Customs and Excise, in association with The Natural History Museum, launched an exhibition at the Museum to enlist public support in the battle to save the world's endangered species.

Every year Customs Officers at ports and airports seize thousands of souvenirs made from endangered animals and plants. The great majority of these seizures are from ordinary travellers who have no idea that some of their holiday purchases are illegal and help push endangered wildlife closer to the brink of extinction.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "I shall be visiting the exhibition to learn more about this terrible trade in wildlife souvenirs. People should steer well clear of these souvenirs."

Notes To Editors: In the 1995-1996 financial year Customs and Excise seized 12,178 items derived from endangered species, 4,374 live animals and 2,748 plants.

A large number of these seizures are from ordinary travellers. However the high prices for some endangered species attract some commercial smugglers - and the Department is particularly vigilant against such criminals.

The most common souvenirs liable to be seized by Customs are ivory, coral and handbags made from reptiles. Customs officers also regularly seize live tortoises, ashtrays made from crocodile heads, carved whale teeth and a variety of stuffed birds and other animals including baby crocodiles holding parasols and sea turtles.

For Immediate Release. No 219/97 Tuesday 1 July 1997

WESTMINSTER VISIT FOR COATES LANE PRIMARY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, played host today to Barlick head teacher, Sue Holloway, and children from the town's Coates Lane Primary School.

The Group were in London for a Charter Mark event at the Cabinet Office in Whitehall. Afterwards they had tea at the House of Commons with the MP.

Afterwards, the MP said: "Coates Lane Primary is a splendid school that is going from strength to strength. It was good to see the Head and the children in London and to show them a bit of Westminster."

For Immediate Release. No 220/97 Wednesday 2 July 1997

MP WELCOMES BUDGET FOR PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES

Local MP Gordon Prentice today welcomed the first Budget of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "This Budget delivers on Labour's Manifesto promises: it delivers resources for the people's priorities of education and health. It puts people back to work through a windfall tax on the privatised utilities and cuts VAT on fuel to 5%. Today's Budget is good news for Pendle. It meets the people's priorities with help for our local schools and health service. Altogether in the Budget there is £2.3 billion for schools and £1.2 billion for the health service."

"The welfare to work programme announced by the Chancellor will give new hope to the young and long-term unemployed people. Recent figures show that here in Pendle there are 192 young people unemployed over six months and 135 long term unemployed over 2 years. They will benefit from the Budget with new opportunities for work and training. Lone parents will also receive new help to find work and get child care."

The MP added: "The Chancellor announced that VAT on domestic fuel will be cut from 8% to 5% - the lowest level allowed. This means that in Pendle no fewer than 16,259 pensioners will benefit from lower fuel bills in time for this coming winter."

"I am also delighted that the Chancellor has decided to begin the phased release of local authority capital receipts over the next two years to build new homes and renovate existing homes. For the first time in eighteen years we have seen a Budget for all the people of Pendle."

For Immediate Release. No 221/97 Thursday 3 July 1997

PRENTICE BACKS NEW DEAL FOR LONE PARENTS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the pioneering plan to offer help to half a million lone parents to get off benefit and into work.

The New Deal for Lone Parents will invite lone parents with school age children into the Job Centre for help and advice on jobs, training and childcare. The programme will start with 40,000 lone parents in eight parts of the country from 21 July. The full national programme for half a million lone parents will follow from October next year. There will also be increased help with childcare costs for those in work on low incomes.

Speaking at Westminster earlier today, the Pendle MP said: "The Budget provides £200 million pounds for lone parents and help with childcare costs. And we shall also be working hard to increase the supply of trained childcare workers by up to 50,000 over the lifetime of the parliament.

"One million lone parents are now bringing up 2 million children

dependent on benefit, at a cost of £10 billion a year.

The MP added: "Lone parents in Britain are among the least likely to work. But we know from research that 90 percent of lone mothers want to work - they do not want to depend on benefit."

Note to Editors: The Budget introduced two improvements to the childcare disregard in Family Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit: •An increase in the maximum allowance for childcare costs from £60 to £100 a week for families with two or more children and •an increase in the maximum age from 11 to 12. The present maximum age of 11 for eligibility for the disregard can mean in some cases that mothers with children still at primary school are cut off from any help with childcare costs.

For Immediate Release. No 222/97 Thursday 3 July 1997

PRENTICE HOPES STANDARDS REPORT WILL "SPELL THE END OF SLEAZE" IN PARLIAMENT

The publication of the report by the Committee on Standards and Privileges into the Neil Hamilton affair and has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The report examines the claims made by Harrods boss, Mohammed Al Fayed, and the Guardian that certain named MPs improperly took cash, gifts and holidays for "Parliamentary services" without declaring them.

The Pendle MP said: "Sleaze cast an appalling cloud over the last Parliament. All MPs felt tainted by it."

"I hope that the publication of this report and the new rules following Nolan will mean a fresh start for Parliament. I am sick to death with all the sleazy revelations."

The MP added: "What is really needed is a new criminal offence to outlaw inducements and bribes to MPs. People need to have confidence that those they elect to represent them in Parliament are not on the make nor on the take. That is the bottom line."

For Immediate Release. No 223/97 Thursday 3 July 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP WILL BE AT THE ANNUAL PRIZE GIVING AT LOMESHAYE COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL on Friday, 4 July at 1.30pm

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting the school tomorrow, Friday 4 July at 1.30pm to say hello to the staff and children and to help give out the prizes.

Note to Editors: The Head teacher is Carl M. Robertson MA B.Phil

For Immediate Release. No 224/97 Monday 7 July 1997

MP SAYS AL FAYED SHOULD BE TOLD WHY HE WAS REFUSED UK CITIZENSHIP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today told Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien that the Harrods boss, Mohammed Al Fayed, should be given reasons why the previous Government deemed him unfit to be a British citizen.

The Pendle MP told the Commons there was a huge paradox in that Al Fayed was refused UK citizenship by the previous Government "acting out of political spite" when he was the person who exposed the disgraced Neil Hamilton as "a liar and a cheat".

Speaking after the exchange, Prentice said: "It seems quite wrong to me that someone who has lived here for over thirty years, employs thousands of people and does not have a criminal record should be denied citizenship without good reason."

The MP added: "If Mohammed Al Fayed is unfit to be a British citizen I think, at the very least, he deserves to be told why. I should add that I have never met nor have I ever spoken to Mr Al Fayed in all the years in which I have been pursuing this issue."

Note to Editors: Last week in the wake of the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee into the cash for questions affair, the MP called for a new criminal offence to outlaw inducements and bribes to MPs.

Note 2 to Editors: On 13 November 1996 the Court of Appeal ruled that the previous Home Secretary, Michael Howard, should

explain why he had refused British citizenship to the Fayed Brothers - the Egyptian born owners of Harrods. The then Home Secretary appealed against the decision in the House of Lords.

In April 1996, the then Home Office Minister Timothy Kirkhope told the Pendle MP that he was unwilling to disclose the reasons for blackballing the Al Fayed brothers who have spent over thirty years in this country.

MP SAYS AL FAYED SHOULD BE TOLD WHY HE WAS REFUSED UK CITIZENSHIP

Prentice told the Commons the Minister's decision was "an act of political spite".

In February 1996, the judges turned down an application by Al Fayed for a judicial review but said the Home Secretary's decision did not have the "appearance of fairness" and that the "secrecy was unattractive". The judge said the then Home Secretary should think again and reconsider.

Note 3 to Editors: The FT wrote on 14 May 1995: The Fayed brothers' dispute with the Government began in 1987 when the Department of Trade and Industry mounted an investigation of their takeover of the House of Fraser group. It came to a head last year, when Mr Mohammed Fayed alleged that two Conservative MPs - Mr Tim Smith and Mr Neil Hamilton - had asked Parliamentary questions on his behalf in exchange for cash and hospitality. Mr Smith resigned his post as a parliamentary private secretary; Mr Hamilton denied taking cash for questions but quit his Ministerial job after details emerged of his stay at Mr Fayed's Ritz Hotel in Paris. Last October, Mr Howard rejected claims that he intervened in the citizenship applications made by the two brothers.

Note 4 to Editors: In October 1996 Neil Hamilton sensationally pulled out of an action against the Guardian newspaper. Hamilton dropped his libel action against the Guardian at the eleventh hour prompting the paper to denounce the former DTI Minister as a liar and a cheat. The Guardian stated as fact that Hamilton took thousands of pounds in cash from Fayed and accepted gifts and lavish hospitality.

For Immediate Release. No 225/97 Tuesday 8 July 1997

PENDLE MP WELCOMES NEW DEBATE ON EDUCATION

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the new national debate on education launched yesterday by Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett. The consultation on the White Paper is set to be one of the biggest since the war.

Blunkett called on parents and pupils, teachers and academics, school governors and local education authorities, business and the local community to join the national debate on the Government's proposals to raise school standards, published today in the "Excellence in schools" White Paper.

The Minister has written to every school in the country asking them to hold open meetings where parents can join in the great education debate. Governors, head teachers and teachers will also be holding their own meetings and open discussions on the proposals. The full and summary versions are being sent to all schools, all LEAs and national bodies.

Supermarket giants Tesco, Sainsbury, Morrisons, British Home Stores and selected stores in the W H Smith group have also agreed to stock copies of the summary version bringing the White Paper to millions of people around the country. To help them make their views count, there is a tear-off slip in the summary version which can be sent Freepost.

The full version of the White Paper will now be in all stationery office booksellers. It will also be available in full and summary form on the Internet at the DfEE website http:/www.open.gov.uk/dfee/dfeehome.htm.

For Immediate Release. No 226/97 Tuesday 8 July 1997

AGE SHOULD BE NO BAR TO THE BENCH SAYS MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the decision of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, to increase the upper age limit for the appointment of magistrates from the age of 55, which tends to operate in practice, to 65. The Pendle MP says the move was long overdue.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Age discrimination has to be tackled in all its manifestations. Why someone should be

regarded as over the hill at 55 beats me! Judges seem to go on forever!"

The statutory retirement age of 70 remains, as does the youngest age at which an applicant can be considered which is 27.

Lord Irvine added: "The current policy is ageist. I believe it acts as
an inhibition and does not pay sufficient regard to the contribution which older people can make to the life of their communities. Increasingly, people are remaining fit and active into their later years and many retain an ability to perform public service."

Notes for Editors: Justices of the Peace are appointed on behalf of the Queen by the Lord Chancellor, except in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire where appointments are made by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Lord Chancellor and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster make approximately 1700 appointments to the magistracy each year. As at 1 January 1997 there were 30,374 lay magistrates in England and Wales, of whom 14,516 were women and 15,858 were men. Almost all criminal cases start in the magistrates' court and over 95% of cases are completed there.

For Immediate Release. No 227/97 Tuesday 8 July 1997

REGENERATION CHALLENGE FUND TO BE TARGETED AT AREAS OF NEED SAYS REGIONS MINISTER

The Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund (SRB) will put a greater emphasis on local priorities, local involvement and on tackling the needs of the most deprived areas, Regions Minister Richard Caborn announced today. The announcement was welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who has long argued for a refocussing of the programme towards deprived areas.

The Minister was launching supplementary guidance for Round 4 of SRB Challenge Fund which outlines the Government's policies and priorities. He said: 'The SRB is one of our most useful tools for tackling social exclusion - pockets of need which may not be targeted in main programmes. But it has tended to

be fragmented and unfocussed. The competition for resources without coherent regional strategy has become something of a beauty contest. I want to ensure that SRB funding is well-spent, that it is based on priorities set locally rather than in Whitehall, and that it reaches those who most need it."

"We recognise that every region is different and has its own needs and priorities. Each Government Office will therefore be issuing its own guidance setting out the regional context of needs and priorities, within which bids will be assessed. We will also set up in each region a small panel of outside experts, drawn from organisations active in regeneration, to help examine bids for funding regeneration projects."

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, added: "Clearly, I am keeping my fingers crossed that Pendle Partnership's bid gets the go ahead. I know that many people in Pendle are working hard on the new bid."

more follows

REGENERATION CHALLENGE FUND TO BE TARGETED AT AREAS OF NEED SAYS REGIONS MINISTER

Note to Editors: The detailed guidance issued to bidders this week sets out four priorities: •a requirement that proposals for funding contribute to the Government's Manifesto commitment to carry out a concerted attack against multiple causes of social and economic decline, and fit with its new policies, including those relating to employment, including child care provision, education, crime, housing and sustainable development; •a greater emphasis on tackling the needs of communities in the most deprived areas; •a requirement that proposals should take account of existing strategies for promoting economic development and tackling deprivation; and •a more collaborative approach between those preparing proposals, their partners and Government Offices for the Regions in order to arrive at a shared understanding of regeneration needs and priorities, and to stimulate fresh thinking.

Bidding guidance for Round 4 of the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund was published on 19 March. The supplementary guidance is to be used in conjunction with this.

For Immediate Release. No 228/97 Thursday 10 July 1997

MP WELCOMES MOVE ON GENETIC TESTING

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed a new consultation document from the Human Genetics Advisory Commission (HGAC)
which will quiz the insurance industry on the use of genetic tests.

The aim of the two month consultation is to invite a broad range of opinion within the industry and beyond on issues such as how genetic tests are interpreted by insurers and how decisions are made, the extent of the information collected and questions of confidentiality and security.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Genetic testing in the context of insurance raises big issues. The science of genetics is developing at incredible speed and we must look at the issues now that are likely to confront us in the very near future."

Notes to Editors: The consultation period will last until 10 September. The document is available on request from Chris Hepworth (Faxed requests preferred. Fax: 0171-271 2028 Tel: 0171-271 2064).

HGAC's Terms of Reference are to: keep under review scientific progress at the frontiers of human genetics and related fields; report on issues arising from new developments in human genetics that can be expected to have wider social, ethical and/or economic consequences, for example in relation to public health, insurance, patents and employment; advise on ways to build public confidence in, and understanding of, the new genetics.

For Immediate Release. No 229/97 Tuesday 15 July 1997

SCHOOLS AND THE INTERNET

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed proposals by the telecommunications watchdog OFTEL aimed at ensuring all schools across the country have access to the Internet at affordable rates.

The MP says the paper published by Don Cruickshank, Director General of Telecommunications is a step in the right direction.

Speaking from Westminster the MP said: "Phone bills for accessing the Internet can be a big worry and schools also want pain free access to the net. I want to see all our local schools wired up to give local children an opportunity to access the vast encyclopaedia of information on the net."

Note to Editors: There are two key elements to OFTEL's proposals:
participation by all telecommunications companies ensuring BT prices its services fairly so that there can be competition between different companies. When schools go on-line to the Internet they frequently use two different telecommunications companies to make the call. There is the company providing the line to the school and the company providing the link to the Internet service provider. The fact that there are two companies involved is invisible to schools but both telecommunications companies need to review their charges if schools are to have affordable prices. Copies of the consultative document are available to the media from OFTEL Press Office. It will also be on OFTEL's Internet site at: http:// www.oftel.gov.uk

The proposal BT submitted to OFTEL in May was to provide schools with access to an Internet service provider of their choice for 3 hours use per school day throughout the school year. The proposed charges were £790 per annum for ISDN2, with no separate connection charge. or £445 per annum for PSTN access with a connection charge of £100. These charges are for calls. They do not cover Internet service provider charges.

For Immediate Release. No 230/97 Tuesday 15 July 1997

MINISTERS PUT PRIVATE SECURITY INDUSTRY UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves by fellow Lancashire MP and Home Secretary, Jack Straw, to regulate the private security industry.

The Pendle MP said: "The private security industry now employs more people than the police, yet it is subject to no scrutiny or accountability. This massive increase in the size of the industry

has been due to the huge increase in crime over the last 18 years."

"That has led to cowboy operators, often with criminal records, setting up rogue companies, as well as criminals being employed in the sector. Regulation is supported by the established sector such as Securicor and Group 4 as well as the police and local authorities. It was recommended by the all-party Home Affairs Committee in 1995 but was opposed by the crooks and the previous Government, whose obsession with deregulation meant that no action was taken."

Speaking to the British Security Industry Association earlier today Mr Straw said: "It is an extraordinary irony that an industry which attempts to regulate the behaviour of others is subject to no regulation itself. The result is that cheats and villains are able to operate. These rogues undermine the reputation of established companies who enforce effective standards and self-regulation.

"I know that you, the established sector, have long thought that statutory regulation is the best way to ensure proper standards, to protect the public and weed out the cowboys and cheats who besmirch the industry's good name."

For Immediate Release. No 231/97 Wednesday 16 July 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS DOWN AGAIN

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit in Pendle last month fell to 1,372 (3.7%) the lowest figure for years. The June figure was itself down from 1,463 (3.9%) in May.

There were 1,074 men (4.9%) and 298 women (1.9%) unemployed and claiming benefit in June. The number of vacancies advertised at Job centres in Colne and Nelson were 205 and 391 respectively.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "These are very encouraging figures."

"Getting people back into decent, well paid work lies at the heart of the new Labour Government's economic strategy. The best form of social security is a job."

For Immediate Release. No 232/97 Wednesday 16 July 1997

MP WARNS AITKEN "DON'T DO A RUNNER!"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today warned former Tory Cabinet Minister Jonathan Aitken to stay in the country and "face the music" following allegations that he committed perjury in the course of his libel action against the Guardian and Granada's World in Action.

At Prime Minister's Questions in the Commons today, the Pendle MP told Tony Blair that the majority of people found guilty of perjury receive immediate custodial sentences. He found it astonishing that the "crusader for truth and arms dealer" Jonathan Aitken could simply "swan off on holiday to California and France". The PM declined to comment on the case saying perjury or other criminal offences were matters for the appropriate authorities.

Speaking afterwards, the Pendle MP said: "Perjury is a deadly serious offence. As a former Cabinet Minister who resigned from the Government to bring an action for libel, he would have received hundreds of thousands of pounds in damages had his action succeeded. He pulled out when his evidence under oath was contradicted by counsel for the Guardian. He just can't walk away from it all pretending to himself and the rest of us that it didn't happen."

"The rich and the powerful are subject to the same laws of the land as the rest of us."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP has also asked the Home Secretary if he has any plans to review the law of perjury. Home Office Minister Alun Michael told the MP today: "We have no plans to do so at present. Criminal sanctions are already available in appropriate cases. A person knowingly making a false report to the police which tends to show that they have evidence material to a police inquiry may be charged with wasting police time and could be liable on conviction to imprisonment up to six months or

MP WARNS AITKEN "DON'T DO A RUNNER!"

a fine of £1,000. A person making a statement to a court which is material to the proceedings and which they know to be false may be liable to conviction for perjury and could face a prison sentence for up to seven years. The more serious common law offence of perverting or attempting to pervert the course of justice is committed where a person(s) acts or embarks upon a course of conduct which has a tendency to and is intended to pervert the course of justice. It is a matter for the prosecuting authorities to decide in any such case whether there is sufficient evidence to mount a prosecution and whether it would be in the public interest. There are around 200 prosecutions for perjury a year of which a high proportion of cases result in convictions.

For Immediate Release. No 233/97 Thursday 17 July 1997

MP WELCOMES PENSIONS REVIEW

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the announcement today by Social Security Secretary, Harriet Harman, of a fundamental and wide ranging review of all aspects of pension provision. Speaking from Westminster earlier today the East Lancashire MP said the move delivers on Labour's manifesto commitment, and is another step towards reforming the Welfare State - a key priority of the Government.

Prentice said: "The Government will consult all interested parties - business, financial institutions, pensioners organisations, trade unions and independent pension experts - to submit proposals on issues and policies. The views of pensioners will be heard at the heart of the Review, particularly through Jack Jones and the National Pensioners Convention."

The Social Security Secretary has set out nine challenges that the pensions review must address. It must:

- achieve a sustainable consensus on pensions policy
- agree where the responsibility for funding pensions should lie
- respond to demographic change
- respond to social and labour market change
- ensure resources devoted to pensions are used to maximum effect

• strike the right balance between the generations
• narrow the pensions gap between men and women
• get the regulation of pensions right
• raise awareness of pensions and improve the level of financial education.

Harriet Harman added: "The Government is committed to retaining the basic state pension as the foundation of pension provision, increased at least in line with prices. We will examine ways of

delivering more automatic help to the poorest pensioners. The way to stop tomorrow's pensioners falling into poverty and dependence on the state when they retire is for people to have a good second pension, to build on the foundation of the basic state pension."

Note To Editors: The Government will:

- support and strengthen the framework for occupational pensions

- develop new stakeholder pensions - value for money, flexible second pensions for people who currently do not have access to an occupational pension and for whom private personal pensions are often poor value for money

- seek to develop the administrative structure of SERPS to create a citizenship pension for those who assume responsibility as carers, and as a result lose out on the pension entitlements they would otherwise acquire.

In the Budget, Labour took immediate action to help today's pensioners by cutting VAT on fuel, helping to insulate pensioners homes through the Environmental taskforce, and cutting pensioners fuel bills by reducing the gas levy to zero. The Government will publish its proposals for further consultation in the first part of 1998.

For Immediate Release. No 234/97 Monday 21 July 1997

MP WELCOMES NEW PROBE INTO ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO FRAUD

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the Government's new probe into alcohol and tobacco fraud. In the Budget earlier this month, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, gave an undertaking that he would be tackling alcohol and tobacco smuggling and fraud.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: "This is something that should have been done by the previous Conservative Government. They were guilty of serious neglect. They allowed a situation to develop where whole areas of the country were awash with smuggled booze. Cigarette and tobacco smuggling was becoming big business. These illegal activities have hit Government and industry revenues both directly and through their repercussions on health, law and order. It has got to stop."

Note to Editors: Customs have set up a review team to take forward the project in consultation with interested parties in order to report back to Ministers by the end of December. The major alcohol and tobacco industry trade associations will be contacted shortly, but contributions from other representative bodies are welcome.

The alcohol and tobacco review. Terms of reference: To conduct a review which looks at the effect on the Exchequer and on industry revenue of alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross border shopping, also looking at health and law and order issues in relation to these activities, with a view to presenting options to Ministers for addressing these issues, in partnership with industry, by 31 December 1997.

This will be achieved by identifying the direct and indirect effects, including health, law and order and competition law, of commercial fraud, smuggling and cross border shopping; assessing the contribution to these issues of a wide range of factors such as the relaxation of border controls as a result of the Single Market; pricing structures; tax rates; transport costs; marketing; changing consumer tastes and competition law; identifying and costing possible measures to address these issues.

For Immediate Release. No 235/97 Monday 21 July 1997

GOVERNMENT TO CRACK DOWN ON BOGUS IMMIGRATION ADVISERS

The Government intends to stop the damaging activities of unscrupulous immigration advisers and will publish a consultation
paper shortly says the Minister for Immigration, Mike O'Brien. The move has been welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says some of the so-called "immigration advisers" are parasites feeding off unsuspecting and trusting people.

The consultation paper will consider whether a self-regulatory or statutory scheme is necessary. After consultation the Government intends to act.

Mr O'Brien said: "Let's be clear. The quality of some immigration advisers is high but many others are costing taxpayers thousands of pounds by delaying cases where people ought to be returned, conducting frivolous judicial reviews financed by legal aid and clogging up the immigration and asylum system. The real victims are often the people they advise."

The Pendle MP added: "The new Labour Government is committed to fairer, faster and firmer immigration procedures. Cracking down on abuse by immigration advisers will be a key element of our strategy."

Note to Editors: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate is to be modernised by large-scale computerisation designed to speed up the consideration of cases. The appeals system is to be made more efficient. The system the Government inherited is flawed. That is why Ministers will look critically at all aspects of immigration and asylum law and procedures including the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act.

For Immediate Release. No 236/97 Monday 21 July 1997

MP TELLS MINISTER "DON'T LEAVE PENDLE BEHIND"

Digital Terrestrial Television and Digital Audio Radio could pass Pendle by according to local MP, Gordon Prentice. He claims the new signals which will be broadcast early next year will, at first, only reach 60% of the UK population and Pendle and other similar areas outside the big urban areas are likely to lose out.

In the Commons this afternoon he urged the newly re-designated "Culture, Media and Sports" Minister, Chris Smith, to make sure "that BBC licence payers get the same service wherever they live in the UK". Smith said he wanted nationwide coverage to be in place just as soon as possible. Prentice said people in North East Lancashire were fed up being treated as the country cousins - "no Channel 5, very little cable and left behind when digital gets switched on next year."

Speaking after the exchange, the Pendle MP said: "Pendle has been a broadcasting black hole for years but what the BBC is now doing is simply rubbing salt into the wound. We all pay the same licence fee so I want to see the digital services rolled out across the UK as quickly as humanly possible so no-one is left behind."

The MP added: "I don't want people in Pendle waiting until the millennium for services that will be available next year in places such as London, Leeds and Manchester."

Note to Editors: Digital Terrestrial Television will allow very high quality wide screen transmission with sound as good as CDs. Digital Audio Radios will be in the shops at Christmas. The new CD quality radios will have in-built display screens which will tell the listener what he or she is listening to - over and above the station ID. A listener to Radio 3, for example, will have the name of the composer on the screen to accompany the music.

For Immediate Release. No 237/97 Tuesday 22 July 1997

THE PEOPLE'S LOTTERY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the Government's plans for reforming the National Lottery.

Speaking from Westminster after the Culture Secretary's announcement, the MP said: "The National Lottery is to be transformed to reflect the people's priorities and that must be the right way forward. I want to see resources going into cash staved areas where excellent projects are too often held back - not by want of enthusiasm or commitment but solely because there is no money."

The White Paper published on Monday - *The People's Lottery* - sets out the Government's plans to make the Lottery work better - for everyone who plays it and everyone who benefits from the good causes it supports by:

• putting Lottery money into a New Opportunities Fund for innovative initiatives to improve Britain's education, health and environment additional to core spending programmes financed through taxation

• encouraging the lottery distributors to develop strategies based on needs, to give priority to health, education and the environment, empower local communities and give applicants a more efficient service,

• creating a National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) to foster talent and creativity and create a lasting legacy for the next century, and

• reforming the way the Lottery is operated and regulated so that the next licence holder produces the best possible return for good
causes.

THE PEOPLE'S LOTTERY

The White Paper invites views on the detail of the Government's plans. Legislation will follow by the end of the year.

The MP added: "The national lottery can be a financial life-line rescuing projects which would otherwise founder. It is important that we get our fair share in North East Lancashire."

Note to Editors: The New Opportunities Fund. The Government plan to create a sixth Good Cause. The New Opportunities Fund will fund spending on specific health, education and, in due course, environmental initiatives beyond core spending programmes financed through taxation. Lottery funding will launch projects which will help give Britain a flying start into the new Millennium.

The first three initiatives to be funded by the People's Lottery will be: • training and support for the nation's 500,000 teachers and some
10,000 librarians in the effective use of information and communications technology (ICT), • out of school hours activities including homework clubs involving half of all secondary schools

and a quarter of all primary schools, and a core network of healthy living centres.

NESTA - A National Trust for Talent and Creativity:
The people of the UK have a genius for creativity and invention - ours is a creative economy. The Government will legislate to establish NESTA as a Trust independent from Government and providing a significant endowment to create a legacy for the future. This will allow NESTA to launch a substantial programme of work aimed at three simple objectives:

• helping talented individuals to develop their full potential in the
creative industries, and in science and technology, • helping turn creativity and ideas into products or services which are effectively
exploited with rights effectively protected, and • contributing to the advancement of public education about - and awareness and appreciation of - areas with which it is involved.

NESTA is a long-term project, a project for the next century. Its work will encompass science, technology and design, film, broadcasting and the audio-visual and music industries, architecture,
the arts, and information and communications technology. The Government believes that NESTA should have a particular focus on
multi-media work and other areas where the arts and science and technology meet. NESTA's work will be governed by five main principles: it will be independent of Government, will not duplicate
the work of other publicly-funded programmes nor substitute for private investment, will be accountable, flexible and will cover the UK.

The White Paper, The People's Lottery, is available from TSO bookshops, price £6.80 (ISBN 0-10-137092-X). The text is also available on the Internet (http://www.culture.gov.uk).

For Immediate Release. No 238/97 Wednesday 23 July 1997

MP WELCOMES NEW WEAPON IN THE FIGHT AGAINST NOISE POLLUTION

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, admits he is delighted that councils will soon be able to crack down hard on noisy neighbours. He says that local authorities which adopt the night time noise provisions of the Noise Act 1996 will be able to use an objective standard against noisy people who drive their neighbours up the wall.

Where adopted, the provisions will be available for use after three
months. The night noise offence applies to domestic premises, and sets a permitted level for noise between 11 pm and 7 am. Environment.

Speaking from Westminster the MP said: "The noisy neighbour is a real pain in the neck - and in the ears! And the problem is getting worse. We know that complaints about domestic noise have been rising at around 10% a year over the last few years."

From today, local authorities have the option of a new power to deal with excessive noise from domestic premises at night. This will be the first time that local authorities will be able to use an objective standard, which should remove the uncertainty about judging whether there is a problem. The MP added: "The provisions of the Noise Act will be particularly effective in dealing with complaints of excessive amplified music. It is about time we got tough on unthinking noisy people who make their neighbour's lives a misery."

Note to Editors: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) is also launching a new free leaflet, Bothered by Noise? Theres no need to suffer . The booklet gives practical advice to people suffering from noise problems, and explains the legislation and controls dealing with noise. It also shows how people can avoid a potential noise problem. National Noise Awareness is being co-ordinated by the National

more follows

MP WELCOMES NEW WEAPON IN THE FIGHT AGAINST NOISE POLLUTION

Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection (NSCA) with support from the DETR. Local authorities have been encouraged to undertake local initiatives to raise awareness of, and educate people about, noise.

The Noise Act 1996 made provision for a night time noise offence, and
clarified local authority powers to confiscate noise-making equipment. The clarified powers of confiscation came into force on 19 September 1996.

The night time noise offence applies only to noise from domestic premises, which includes gardens, outhouses and yards. A warning notice will be served warning the person responsible that if the noise exceeds the permitted level, when measured by the local authority, they can take further action.

The permitted level has been set at 35 dB(A) - or 10 dB(A) above the
underlying level in cases where the underlying level of noise exceeds
25 dB(A).

A Noise Act Circular explaining the provisions and setting out the Secretary of States directions for the permitted level and approvals
for the noise-measuring equipment will be issued to local authorities
this week. Local authorities will also receive guidance on the Noise
and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993.

Bothered by Noise? There is no need to suffer has been distributed to
local authorities and libraries in England, Wales and Scotland. Further copies of the leaflet can be obtained, free of charge, from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Publications Despatch Centre, Blackhorse Road, London, SE99 6TT,
telephone 0181 691 9191.

For Immediate Release. No 239/97 Thursday 24 July 1997

£85,000 BOOST FOR LOCAL BREAST CANCER SERVICES

Breast cancer services nationwide are to get an immediate £10 million boost from the new Labour Government. The money has come from a cut in NHS fundholding bureaucracy.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The quality of breast cancer services for women within East Lancashire Health Authority will be improved by an extra £85,000 this year."

"Breast cancer affects one in twelve women, so I am delighted with this decision. Tackling breast cancer is a top priority."

Notes to Editor: 32,000 women in the UK are diagnosed with breast cancer each year, and it kills 14,000 women annually.

Baroness Jay, Minister for Health, today (24 July 1997) announced details of £10m new schemes to improve breast cancer services in England in 1997/98. This extra money has been allocated fairly between different parts of the country.

The new Government was able to announce this initiative using savings in fundholding bureaucracy. This was made possible by putting on hold the last Tory Government's plan to expand fundholding management costs this year.

For Immediate Release. No 240/97 Monday 28 July 1997

MP WINS PLEDGE FROM BBC - PENDLE WILL GET DIGITAL TV NEXT YEAR

The introduction of digital television and digital radio early next year will not pass Pendle by. This is the key pledge which local MP, Gordon Prentice, has won from the BBC. There were fears that, with only 60% of the country being covered in the first phase of the nationwide roll out of the new services next year, Pendle would be left behind.

Speaking from his North East Lancashire constituency earlier today the MP commented: "What the BBC tells me is very encouraging. I have been banging on for years about the danger of Pendle becoming a technological backwater so I am glad the broadcasters are finally listening. It would have been quite unacceptable for Pendle to be the last in the queue for breakthroughs such as wide screen television. Our licence fee is the same as everyone else's."

Last week in the Commons the MP claimed Digital Terrestrial Television and Digital Radio could pass Pendle by. He said the

new signals to be broadcast early next year would, at first, only reach 60% of the UK population and Pendle and other similar areas outside the big urban areas were likely to lose out.

Note to Editors: Digital Terrestrial Television will allow very high quality wide screen transmission with sound as good as CDs. Digital Audio Radios will be in the shops at Christmas. The new CD quality radios will have in-built display screens which will tell the listener what he or she is listening to - over and above the station ID. A listener to Radio 3, for example, will have the name of the composer on the screen to accompany the music.

For Immediate Release. No 241/97 Thursday 31 July 1997

MP WELCOMES NEW TARGETS FOR JOB CENTRES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the new performance targets for the Employment Service announced by Education and Employment Secretary, David Blunkett.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today the Pendle MP said: "These targets reflect the new Government's commitment to helping people find employment, especially those who are at a disadvantage in the labour market. The clear priority for Employment Service managers is to take the necessary steps to prepare for the introduction of the New Deal in April next year."

David Blunkett added: ""The Employment Service has a vital role to play in helping people without a job back to work, promoting a fair and flexible labour market and creating employability. We expect the Employment Service this year, to place 1.75 million unemployed people into work and to meet stringent targets for delivering the new Government's objectives."

Note to Editors: The ES is preparing for the introduction of the Government's New Deal programme for young people aged 18-24 who have been unemployed for 6 months or more and for long-term unemployed people aged over 25. The Employment Service will ensure that it meets its responsibilities in introducing the new Deal to the timetable agreed with Ministers.

For Immediate Release. No 242/97 Monday 4 August 1997

MP WELCOMES PLANS FOR NEW TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today welcomed plans announced by the Defence Secretary George Robertson to open bids from industry for the Royal Air Force's requirement for new transport aircraft.

The UK will join its European partners in requesting proposals from Airbus Military Company for the supply of the Future Large Aircraft (FLA). At the same time, partners will be encouraged to join with us in seeking bids from other aircraft manufacturers.

George Robertson said: "The programme offers an important opportunity for European industry. The Government believes, however, that there is a need to maintain competitive pressure in order to ensure best value for money. We shall therefore be encouraging our partners to join with us in seeking bids from other aircraft manufacturers."

The Pendle MP added: "Aerospace is a key industry here in the North West and the Government's move will be widely welcomed."

Notes to Editor: The Future Large Aircraft Programme is a collaborative effort which will be run by Airbus Military Company (AMC), a subsidiary of Airbus Industry. The UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Turkey are partners in this. Belgium and Portugal have observer status.

The Request For Proposals (RFP) will allow AMC to put forward a formal detailed technical and financial proposal to partner nations on the basis of agreed requirements on delivery and performance. This will enable the UK and its partners to assess for the first time the aircraft's detailed performance characteristics and the full cost.

For Immediate Release. No 243/97 Monday 4 August 1997

GOVERNMENT TO GIVE COUNCILS MORE FREEDOM TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says he is backing moves to cut detailed central controls over local authorities. He wants to see the "suffocating central controls" reduced as part of the

Government's programme of decentralisation and strengthening local accountability.

The Local Government Minister, Hilary Armstrong, said the publication of the Local Government Efficiency Report was opportune. She said: "The conclusions are very much in tune with our manifesto commitment that local decision making should be less constrained by central government and more accountable to local people, and certain of its specific proposals will be subsumed in some of our major new policy proposals involving local government."

Gordon Prentice added: "The Government is now going to consult councils and others on the report's recommendations and then act. I believe in strong independent local councils responsible to their own electorates for their own decisions. I simply can't stand the buck passing and the shuffling of responsibility that goes on. Local people should have a clear idea what their local council does - and who to blame if things go wrong."

Note to Editors: The report examined many cases where local authorities are required to obtain the prior consent of central government, on a case
by case basis, for an intended course of action in discharge of their
functions, and also looked at the processes within central government. Its recommendations include:

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions should be made formally responsible for maintaining a list of consent regimes, receiving reports from other departments of their reviews of consents and for publishing the updated list annually;

more follows

GOVERNMENT TO GIVE COUNCILS MORE FREEDOM TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS

Government should decide whether to extinguish 44 of its consent powers, amend 90 (including introducing revised procedures for 60 regimes involving local authority byelaws) and review 28 of the remaining 62 within two years:

This efficiency scrutiny was established by the previous administration with the aim of streamlining the relationship between central and local government by removing unnecessary central controls and burdens on local authorities.

Efficiency scrutinies have been a useful method of reviewing an area quickly but in depth, taking a fresh look at the issues and ensuring that prompt action is taken to deliver results. The aim of this process has been to achieve concrete results in two years based on clear recommendations in the scrutiny report.

A consent regime is where a local authority is required to seek the consent of a central Government Department or Agency for its intended course of action in discharge of its functions.

For Immediate Release. No 244/97 Monday 4 August 1997

GOVERNMENT GIVES BACKING TO TOWN CENTRES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves by the new Government to support town centres. The MP's call for action to save the town centre came on the back of the publication of the Government's response to the Environment Select Committee's report on Shopping Centres.

Dick Caborn, Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning, said: "The Government wants to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of our existing city, town and district centres. The Government is strongly committed to ensuring that such centres act as the focus for investment, particularly in retail, office, leisure and other appropriate developments, so as to provide easy access to a wide range of facilities and services by a choice of means of transport.

Speaking from his constituency earlier today, the Pendle MP added: "Town centres need to be sustained, nurtured and generally looked after. Our planning system should ensure town centres are places where people want to be. There is a real job of work to be done to ensure our local town centres in Pendle and elsewhere in East Lancashire are prosperous, successful and vibrant."

Notes to Editor: 1. The House of Commons Environment Committee undertook an inquiry into the future of town centres, reporting in November 1994. It came out strongly against further out-of-town development which would undermine the vitality and viability of town centres. In response to their original report, the Government agreed to tighten up the 1993 Planning Policy

Guidance note (PPG6) on Town Centres and Retail Developments, promote town centre management, undertake research on impact of superstores on market towns and improve retail planning statistics.

2. PPG6 was revised after consultation in June 1995 and a new version was published in June 1996. The Environment Committee decided

GOVERNMENT GIVES BACKING TO TOWN CENTRES

to undertake a follow-up inquiry and evidence was taken in January/February this year, with a report issued in March.

3. The Committee was very pleased with the revised PPG6, but has
asked for: the PPG to be kept under review; the Government to take a
tough approach with large-scale leisure developments to avoid damage
to town and district centres; research to be undertaken and further
advice be provided on impact assessment; guidance to be issued on the
use of compulsory purchase orders to assist site assembly in town
centres; to tackle unimplemented planning permissions for
out-of-town developments; planning agreements to be open for public
inspection; a fundamental review of transport policy; a levy on car
parking at out-of-town developments to be considered; the issue of
funding town centre management to be resolved; and a review to be
undertaken of the development plan system.

4. The Government Response provides a positive answer to most of
these recommendations.

5. This issue of focussing key town centre uses in existing centres, has produced all-party agreement. The publication of the Response is the first formal statement that the Government is still

committed to focusing development on existing centres in order to
encourage their regeneration and revitalisation.

6. The Response emphasises the Government's commitment: -

to regenerating existing centres, whether city centres, town centres
centres, by focusing not only investment in retail developments but
also leisure, offices and other town centre activities;

-to an integrated transport strategy; and

-to speeding up the planning system.

For Immediate Release. No 245/97 Monday 4 August 1997

MP HAILS DECISION ON CASTLE CEMENT

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the announcement by the Environment Agency banning the use of the controversial cemfuel at Castle Cement's Clitheroe plant until the agency is fully satisfied with the arrangements for "sampling, analysis, storage and preparation for burning'. The move will be widely welcomed by local campaigners who have argued that cemfuel is a danger to health.

Prentice commented: "I have been arguing for years that no substance should be used in cement kilns unless and until it has a squeaky clean bill of health. It is now up to the company to satisfy the Environment Agency that it is completely safe. In the meantime, Castle Cement will have to burn an acceptable alternative fuel."

The Pendle MP courted controversy in early 1996 when he raised the issue in an adjournment debate in the House of Commons. The Conservative MP for Ribble Valley, Nigel Evans, was angry at the alleged interference by the Pendle MP in matters concerning his (Evans) constituency.

For Immediate Release. No 246/97 Tuesday 5 August 1997

PENDLE MP FORCES NEW BLOOD INTO DUCHY BENEVOLENT FUND

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is seeing the wind of change blow through one of the Kingdom's most ancient and obscure institutions - the Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund. The Fund distributes money from the estates of people who die within the borders of the old County Palatine.

The Chancellor of the Duchy, David Clark MP, has told the Pendle MP that he intends to put an elected councillor onto the Fund - the Chairman of Lancashire County Council.

Speaking from his constituency earlier today, the MP said: "This is a move in the right direction. We need to get some daylight into these dark corners of the British constitution."

Note to Editors: David Clark wrote to the MP on 31 July as follows: "At oral question on Wednesday 4 June you asked me about the Duchy Benevolent Fund. We have also discussed this matter further in the House. Since the I have asked the three Lord-Lieutenants from the County Palatine to form small advisory boards to assist them in making donations in their respective counties. The Lord-Lieutenants would forward the names of people who have a good knowledge of the charitable scene in their respective counties... I am also proposing to invite the Chairman of Lancashire County Council to become a trustee of the Fund. I hope you will agree that this will be a more open way of distributing money from the Fund.

Last year, Pendle folk have benefited most from cash awards from the Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund during the past year. The Fund distributes cash from the estates of people who have died in Lancashire without leaving a will. The money goes to the Queen (as Duke of Lancaster) rather than to the Exchequer which is the case elsewhere.

more follows

PENDLE MP FORCES NEW BLOOD INTO DUCHY BENEVOLENT FUND

In 1996 Pendle people put in more applications than anywhere else but the strike rate wasn't too good. Only 6 were successful. This compares with
Preston where 11 out of 13 applications were successful. In 1995, more donations were made to Pendle groups than in previous years. The MP kicked up a storm in 1994 when he discovered the amount of money going to Pendle was much less than comparable areas. He campaigned relentlessly to get people to apply for the cash that was available.

Last year, the MP urges local groups to bid for Duchy cash. The Benevolent Fund of the Duchy of Lancaster - which distributes money from the estates of those who die within the boundaries of the old County of Lancashire without making a will - gave £200 to a young person in Earby in 1995. They also gave £400 to Mansfield High School; £450 to Barnoldswick Park Rovers FC; £1,000 to Pendle Duke of Edinburgh's Award Team and £500 to Colne Parish Church. In 1994 Burnley and Pendle Greenspace received £400 and £250 went to a Nelson woman who is handicapped.

Grants to Pendle people in 1993 amounted to £714 - £150 to an invalid in Colne, £500 to a handicapped person in Barnoldswick and £64 to another handicapped person in Barnoldswick. In 1994 the Pendle MP persuaded the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to reverse a decision of the Duchy's Benevolent Fund not to grant aid the Lancashire Free Legal Advice Centre who needed money to buy updates for their law library.

The history of the Duchy of Lancaster goes back to the 13th century. Since 1399 this estate passed to each reigning monarch with the Duchy revenues providing a source of income separate from other Crown inheritances. This separate identity was preserved when in 1760 George III surrendered the revenue from the Crown Estates to the Government in exchange for the Civil List but retained the Duchy of Lancaster revenues.

For Immediate Release. No 247/97 Tuesday 5 August 1997

MP BLOWS A GASKET OVER LOW FLYING

The RAF is the latest target of local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says fast jets have again been buzzing his home town of

Barnoldswick. He claims the jets swooped over Barlick on Monday night and at 3.30pm today, Tuesday.

The MP commented: "There has been a change of Government but seemingly no change of policy so far as these fast jets are concerned. The RAF says our pilots have to be trained to fly at low level but that doesn't mean roof top sorties over built up areas."

"I have today contacted the Defence Secretary George Robertson to express my continuing concerns. Barnoldswick isn't an insignificant spec on the map. Over 10,000 people live in the town and the RAF should give it a wide berth."

For Immediate Release. No 248/97 Monday 11 August 1997

MP WANTS VIEWS ON ROADS STRATEGY

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, wants to know what his Pendle constituents think about the Government's recently published roads review. He has sent copies of the consultation paper to people who have been in touch with him previously about roads issues.

Speaking from his Nelson Office earlier today, the Pendle MP said: "No-one seriously believes we can build our way out of congestion. There has been an astonishing 80% increase in motorway traffic in just 10 years to 1996. Traffic volume is growing massively year on year. Clearly we need to find other solutions."

"In the three months since the General Election we have been getting to grips with the poisonous inheritance the Tories left us. Part of this legacy has been an uncoordinated and ad hoc roads programme. The old set-up allowed transport policy to be decided in a vacuum, sealed off from environmental and other considerations. We are changing all that."

"The Government's Integrated Transport Strategy will mean a real break with the past. The consultation paper will be published at the end of August with three months set aside for people to let us have their views. The White Paper will follow early next year

and it will map out the direction of policy for the remainder of the Parliament and beyond."

"Pendle has had its fair share of transport problems including the sale of the local bus company to the predator Stagecoach. We are separately looking at competition policy to make sure there is a level playing field between the public and private sectors. I hope my local council will let the Government have its considered views on bus policy."

More follows:

MP WANTS VIEWS ON ROADS STRATEGY

Note to Editors: Provisional figures for the second quarter of 1997 published today show a four per cent growth in motor traffic on the same quarter of 1996. Within this total, goods vehicle traffic rose by eight per cent.

The statistical bulletin Traffic in Great Britain - Second Quarter 1997 also shows that, after seasonal adjustment, car, light van and goods vehicle traffic showed strong growth between the first and second quarters of 1997. The rise was rather higher than in recent quarters. However, a single quarter's figures should not be taken to reflect a change in the underlying growth rate.

Traffic on motorways grew by seven per cent over the year to the second quarter of 1997. Although motorways have only a quarter of the road length of trunk roads, they carry about four times as much traffic.

The next quarterly bulletin in this series will be published on Thursday 6 November 1997.

For Immediate Release. No 249/97 Monday 11 August 1997

YOUNG PEOPLE GIVE MP A HELPING HAND

Two young people will be giving local MP, Gordon Prentice, a helping hand over the coming weeks. They will see at first hand what it is to be a Member of Parliament, spending time with the MP visiting organisations, preparing for meetings and dealing with all the paperwork.

Sixteen year old Iasma Asghar will be joining the Carr Road team at the end of August on a Project Trident work experience placement from Edge End School where she is a student. She will be joining the MP on visits to places as diverse as British Aerospace at Salmesbury and Country Holidays in Earby.

Richard Blakely will be working at Carr Road from the end of August until Christmas as part of a graduate programme from the University of Lancaster. He will be working on a range of specific projects making full use of his degree subject - Politics!

Speaking from his office in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: "I enjoy taking on these young people. It keeps me on my toes as I have to answer all sorts of questions about how I deal with issues. The downside is that it can be very exhausting!"

Every summer the MP takes on local young people to give them work experience.

For Immediate Release. No 250/97 Tuesday 12 August 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE OPENING OF THE PAKISTAN ARTS AND CRAFTS EXHIBITION, today, Tuesday, 12 August, at 7pm at the Civic Theatre, Stanley Street, Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be attending the opening ceremony of the Pakistan Arts and Crafts Exhibition at 7pm this evening.

The exhibition has been organised by the Consortium of Asian Organisations in Pendle and celebrates the Golden Jubilee of the independence of Pakistan.

For Immediate Release. No 251/97 Monday 11 August 1997

MP BACKS PLANS TO REFORM COMPETITION LAW

Local MP Gordon Prentice has welcomed plans by Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, to tighten up UK competition law. The MP's comments came as the Government published a draft Bill to reform competition law.

Margaret Beckett said: "Present competition law is not working well. Its reform is long overdue. Consumers need a better deal. We need to prevent and remedy anti-competitive behaviour more effectively. We also need to do so efficiently, avoiding placing any unnecessary burdens on business."

The Pendle MP added: "The new legislation will provide a strong deterrent against cartels and other anti-competitive agreements and against abuses of market power. We have seen plenty examples of that during the Conservative years including, notoriously, the bus giant Stagecoach. In future, there will be fines for serious abuses. Competitors and customers damaged by anti-competitive behaviour in breach of the prohibition will be entitled to seek damages. Where necessary, anti-competitive action can be halted pending detailed investigation."

Margaret Beckett said: "My purpose in issuing this document is to ensure that the proposals in the Competition Bill work well and to give those who have the greatest interest in the Bill the opportunity to comment before it is introduced into Parliament. I invite you to use this opportunity."

Notes to Editors:

1. The Competition Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech on 14 May 1997.

2. There will be two prohibitions in the Bill. First a prohibition of anti-competitive agreements, cartels and concerted

MP BACKS PLANS TO REFORM COMPETITION LAW

practices, based closely on Article 85 of the Treaty of Rome. This will be more efficient than the current regime. Second, a prohibition of abuse of a dominant position based closely on Article
86 of the Treaty. This will enable anti- competitive behaviour to be

halted quickly if it is damaging competitors or customers. Penalties
in the form of fines up to 10% of turnover will be possible where the
prohibitions are infringed.

3. The Bill is accompanied by an explanatory guide which also seeks comments on specific issues.

4. Comments on the draft Bill are requested by 30 September 1997.

5. Press copies of the draft Bill are available from DTI Press Office. Other requests for copies should be made by telephone on :
0171 510 0174 or directed in writing to the Competition Bill Team,
Consumer Affairs and Competition Policy Directorate, Room 6.H.21, 1
Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET; fax 0171 215 2837.

6. Copies are also available on the Internet at http//www.dti.gov.uk/competition/bill.

For Immediate Release. No 252/97 Monday 11 August 1997

OPEN UP THE QUANGOES TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY SAYS PENDLE MP

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice says its time for quangoes to feel the glare of public scrutiny on their affairs. For too long he says quangoes have operated "in the shadows" feeling little need to explain their actions to the public and press.

The MP was speaking as the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life was beginning a review of the implementation of its recommendations in its first two reports on national and local quangos and national health service bodies.

The MP said: "Lord Nolan has put the spotlight on Parliament itself and on local government and now he is turning his attention to the bewildering array of quangoes and non-elected

bodies which the Conservative Government left us with. I want to see openness and much greater accountability."

Notes to Editors The bodies covered in the present review are:

National executive non departmental public bodies
NHS Trusts
Further and higher education institutions (including universities)
Grant maintained schools
Housing associations
Training and Enterprise Councils and Local Enterprise Companies

The first Nolan report, as well as dealing with MPs, Ministers and Civil Servants, made extensive recommendations about appointments to and propriety in executive NDPBs and NHS bodies. The second report made recommendations about a range of local public spending bodies. These were Higher and Further Education bodies (including Universities), Grant Maintained Schools, Training and Enterprise Councils and Local Enterprise Companies and Registered Housing Associations. Some are in the public sector, others in the private and voluntary sectors, but all spend public money and provide public services.

For Immediate Release. No 253/97 Wednesday 13 August 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS UP

The number of people out of work in Pendle and claiming benefit last month rose to 1,511 (4.1%) - up from 1,372 (3.7%) in June. 1,157 men were out of work in July (5.3%) and 354 women (2.3%).

There were 174 unfilled vacancies at Colne Job Centre and 326 at Nelson.

Commenting on the latest figures, local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "There is generally a rise in unemployment in July as some seasonal work is finishing and some students join the register."

"The new Labour Government's central policy objective is to get people into work. I have always said that the best form of social

security is a job. Our welfare to work proposals have yet to make an impact on the figures."

"The Government is also looking at the way in which the unemployment figures are compiled. Things got so bad under the previous Government - with over thirty changes - that most people stopped believing they accurately measured the true scale of unemployment."

For Immediate Release. No 254/97 Wednesday 13 August 1997

MP VOICES CONCERNS ABOUT TRANSPORT OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS BY AIR

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says he understands the concerns of people in his Pendle constituency and elsewhere about the transport of nuclear materials by air. Recent reports in the national press have fuelled fears that a plane crash could have devastating consequences.

The MP said: "I am told that the transport of mixed oxide fuel to Carlisle and then on to Sellafield has been going on since 1973 and there have been no incidents. However, that in itself is hardly reassurance enough. It is an unfortunate fact that planes do crash from time to time and if nuclear material is on board it must be in super resilient containers - like the fabled black boxes - robust enough to withstand the impact."

"The transport of radioactive material world-wide is based upon the recommendations of the International Atomic Energy Authority. There have been improvements recently with the introduction of a new "Type C" package but clearly people will need to be convinced these containers can withstand the most severe impact."

"There is also the question of whether radioactive material should in any cases be flown over land and I know the Transport Minister, Gavin Strang, is in discussions with the Civil Aviation Authority about this. The CAA is responsible for licensing air carriers."

The MP, who is PPS to the Transport Minister, was speaking in his Nelson office as the local council's policy committee was preparing to debate the issue (on Thursday 14 August).

For Immediate Release. No 255/97 Wednesday 20 August 1997

MP ALARMED OVER CLOSURE THREAT TO BARLICK'S BENEFITS AGENCY OFFICE

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has expressed alarm over the proposal to close the Benefits Agency Public Caller Office in Barnoldswick - the town where the MP lives.

In an exchange of letters with the Agency, the MP says the alternative of Colne is not convenient for Barlick people who have lost many facilities from the town in recent years.

Speaking from his constituency office earlier today, the MP said: "This news is very disconcerting indeed. I can well understand the wish of the Benefits Agency to save on administrative costs but what about service to the public? I do not want to see this facility close. If there are good reasons I haven't heard them yet."

Note to Editors: The Benefits Agency in Blackburn wrote to the Pendle MP on 8 August as follows: I am writing to seek your views on our proposal to close the Public Caller Office at Barnoldswick.

It may be helpful if I explain the background leading to this proposal. We are undertaking a review of service provision across our Area. The review includes looking at Public Caller Offices to assess the level of service provided. Our aim is to ensure that customers have access to a wide range of services and where possible to modernise and improve the service offered.

Currently Barnoldswick is open on Mondays and Fridays from 9.30 am to 3.30 pm. Approximately 27 people call at the PCO on each day it is open. The service is limited, offering no facilities to make payments of benefit. Research has shown that the majority of these callers wish to return completed forms which could be done by post or to request forms and leaflets which could be done by telephone. The provision of this service at Barnoldswick inevitably leads to a reduction in service at the Burnley office on what are usually the two busiest days of the week.

We will continue to provide a five day service at Colne in the same premises as the Jobcentre which brings together help and advice customers need in

More follows

THREAT TO BARLICK'S BENEFITS AGENCY OFFICE

one place. There is a regular bus service between Barnoldswick and Colne.

I would welcome any views you may have on the proposal to close the Barnoldswick PCO before a final decision on its future is taken. I would be grateful if you could send any comments in writing to me before 19.9.97.

Note 2 to Editors: The MP replied on 15 August as follows:

Thank you for your letter of 8 August advising me of the proposal to close the Public Caller Office at Barnoldswick.

I have to say that I read your letter with dismay, as I cannot understand, for the life of me, why a medium size town such as Barnoldswick, with over 10,000 people, should have to lose so may of its public services and amenities, as if Colne were next door. In fact Colne must be a good five miles away from Barnoldswick and it would certainly be very inconvenient for many people to get to Colne.

You tell me that the Barnoldswick office is open Monday - Friday 9.30am - 3.30pm and that on average 27 people call each day. How does this compare with other PCOs in the North West and nationally? Is it not possible to perhaps restrict the opening hours further - perhaps limiting it to mornings only as an alternative to outright closure? Why is it not possible for the PCO to offer additional services at Barnoldswick which would attract additional callers? Does attendance at the PCO vary seasonally? What about the age profile of those using the PCO, are they more likely to be elderly or infirm?

You mention there is a regular bus service between Barnoldswick and Colne, but this is no substitute for having a PCO on the ground as it were and I would be very much opposed to its closure.

I look forward to hearing from you.

For Immediate Release. No 256/97 Friday 22 August 1997

PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP will be attending the following local events over this weekend

Saturday 23 August: at 10am outside Woolworths in Nelson. The MP will start the annual charity "Cycle around the world" in aid of Whizz Kidz - a charity which provides wheelchairs and mobility aids for disabled children.

Saturday 23 August: at 11.30am at the new West Craven Sports Centre and Learner Pool. Opening ceremony at 12 noon by the football legend Sir Bobby Charlton.

Saturday 23 August: at 6.30pm at the Civic Theatre, Stanley Street, Nelson for the PPWA's Pakistan Independence Day Celebration Dinner.

For Immediate Release. No 257/97 Saturday 23 August 1997

UK AND PAKISTAN ARE "OLD FRIENDS AND MODERN PARTNERS" SAYS PENDLE MP

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, told a special celebration dinner this evening to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Pakistan that the UK and Pakistan are "old friends and modern partners". The MP was one of a number of guests of the PPWA at Nelson's Civic Theatre in Stanley Street.

The MP said the relationship between Britain and the Asian sub continent went back centuries. Britain's first mosque was built in the last century. He said that since independence people arriving from Pakistan to settle here had brought many benefits to the country. He told the gathering: "They have enriched our cultural life, strengthened our economy and have made an enormous contribution to the professions, notably medicine."

"There are 130 million people in Pakistan - more than the UK, France and the low countries and Scandinavia combined. There is a growing market out there and we, with our shared history, should be well placed to develop and strengthen trading links which will benefit Pakistan as well as the UK."

The MP also referred to the unresolved issue of Kashmir. "I want to see the Kashmiris decide their own future."

For Immediate Release. No 258/97 Tuesday 26 August 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT WALTER STREET COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL BRIERFIELD

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be talking to children at Walter Street Primary School this afternoon at 2pm about life as a Member of Parliament.

It is part of the school's "Literacy Festival" to be held this week.

Afterwards the MP will be dropping in on the "Every Opportunity for Women" Business and Careers Advice Centre at 75 Every Street, Nelson.

For Immediate Release. No 259/97 Wednesday 27 August 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT COUNTRY HOLIDAYS TODAY (Wednesday) at 2pm.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting the Earby HQ of Country Holidays at 2pm today. The MP will be touring the site and meeting the Managing Director, Peter Chappelow, and his staff at one of Pendle's biggest employers.

The Holiday Cottages Group which is now owned by Thompson Travel employs 300 staff at Spring Mill, Earby, BB8 6RN. (Tel 01282 844284) and is due to grow to 400 in the next twelve months.

For Immediate Release. No 260/97 Monday 1 September 1997

MP SAYS DIANA'S DEATH "A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY"

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today spoke of his shock and disbelief at the death on Sunday of Princess Diana.

Speaking from his constituency earlier today, the MP said Diana had touched the lives of millions and brought great happiness to the thousands of people who had been helped and comforted by her.

The MP said: "Diana also changed the way in which we view the monarchy."

The MP earlier signed the Book of Condolences at Nelson Town Hall.

For Immediate Release. No 261/97 Monday 1 September 1997

MP TO MEET HEALTH CHIEFS AS DEBATE ON DAY HOSPITAL GROWS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet Brian Foster and David Chew - the Chairman and Chief Executive of Burnley Health Care Trust - tomorrow (Tuesday) to discuss local health issues.

The MP said: "The new Government has made health a top priority and we want to address the problem of health inequality in Britain. Here in North East Lancashire we have more than our fair share of ill health and I want to make sure we are doing all we can to address the root causes."

"I shall also want to discuss the controversial proposal by the Trust to close the Day hospital for the Elderly at Burnley General Hospital. This had generated a lot of anxiety."

The MP added: "Since the election we have made a substantial start on keeping our manifesto promises on health. We are ending the two tier system the Tories left us with. We are dismantling the internal market. In our first Budget we allocated a further £1.2 billion to the NHS next year. We have given a cash boost to breast cancer treatment, opened up Trust Boards and done lots more besides. People want their NHS to deliver the best in health treatment and that is our top priority."

Earlier today the MP met the Chairman and Chief Executive of the East Lancashire Health Authority at its Lomeshaye HQ in Nelson.

For Immediate Release. No 262/97 Tuesday 2 September 1997

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT CHIEF VISITS PENDLE

The Regional Director of the Government Office for the North West, Marianne Neville-Rolfe, will be visiting Nelson this Thursday (4 September) as part of Pendle Partnership's drive to get SRB cash for its "Youth Focus" bid.

An outline submission is to be made by the end of this month and a decision will be taken by Government Ministers early next year. The Regional Office has a crucial role in sifting bids and deciding which ones are to be forwarded to London for consideration.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who will be welcoming the Regional Director, said: "We have a story to tell here in Pendle and we want the new Government to listen."

"All over the country people are bidding for cash to help deal with local problems and create new opportunities. Our young people here in Pendle are talented have a lot to contribute. I want to make sure we have the resources to help them get on."

The visit will take in a drama presentation at Silverman Hall, stop-overs at local points of interest in Nelson before arriving at Edge End School for a programme of events.

Note to Editors: The visit will stress the achievements of young people in Pendle and the partnership which exits between different agencies in the Borough and between the private and public sectors and the voluntary sector.

For Immediate Release. No 263/97 Tuesday 1 August 1997

EDUCATION/NURSERY EDUCATION

For Immediate Release. No 264/97 Monday 8 September 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP AT THE PPWA on Tuesday 9 September at 1pm.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be visiting the Pendle Pakistan Welfare Association at its HQ in Market Square, Nelson, tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1pm to meet Dr Malik and the staff and to talk about the issues facing the local community.

For Immediate Release. No 265/97 Monday 8 September 1997

MP DRIVES HOME THE TRANSPORT MESSAGE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will tell a meeting in Brighton this Wednesday (10 September) that the Government is deadly serious about tackling Britain's looming transport crisis.

Speaking to a fringe meeting at the TUC congress organised by the United Road Transport Union, the MP will say: "The new Government has inherited a poisonous legacy when it comes to transport policy. If nothing is done about traffic growth we shall have national gridlock within 20 years. We need an integrated transport strategy which people understand and support."

"The new Government is not anti-car. The car has brought and still brings great benefits but we cannot build our way of the congestion that faces us. There has to be another way."

"Great Britain has the highest proportion of passenger traffic travelling by car of all the countries in the European Union. We also have one of the lowest proportions travelling by bus and coach and by rail. Here in Britain only 4.5% of journeys are by rail compared with 7.8% in France, 8% in Holland and 9.9% in Austria."

"We need investment in public transport to encourage people to use it. No-one wants to travel in trains or on buses that aren't bright, tidy, punctual and clean."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP is Parliamentary Private Secretary to Transport Minister, Dr Gavin Strang MP

For Immediate Release. No 266/97 Monday 8 September 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP will officially open the newly refurbished Earby youth hostel on Saturday 13th September 1997 at 2pm

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be putting on his hiking boots this Saturday when he officially re-opens the YHA Youth Hostel at Glen Cottage, 9-11 Birch Hall Lane, Earby at 2pm.

The Youth Hostel has undergone a major programme of improvements with a modernisation of the interior, creation of a car park and improvements to the rear of the property. The cost is about £74,000. Pendle Council has produced leaflets and interpretative panels to promote walks in the locality.

The work has been financed by contributions from the YHA, Pendle Borough Council, the Groundwork Trust, the Rural Development Commission, Lancashire County Council, the Earby Forum and others.

Speaking before the official opening the MP said: "The Youth Hostels Association does a great job in helping people of all ages get access to our countryside. I remember visiting Black Sail Youth Hostel in 1994, as a guest of the YHA and the Countryside Commission, trekking deep into the wilderness heart of the lake district. It was a great experience, getting away from it all."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP is a keen hill walker and an enthusiastic campaigner for great access to the countryside. The Operations Manager of the YHA, Bob Barnby will also be present on Saturday.

For Immediate Release. No 267/97 Monday 8 September 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP ANDMICHAEL MEACHER MP to scale Boulsworth Hill on Friday 12th September 1997 at 1pm (meeting at 12 noon)

The Minister for Environmental Protection, Michael Meacher MP, will be joining local MP, Gordon Prentice, for an ascent of Boulsworth Hill this Friday, 12 September. The event has been organised by the Ramblers and the Access to Boulsworth Campaign.

The MPs will meet the ramblers at Widdop Res. Car Park (grid reference 937328) at 1pm.

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP is a keen campaigner for improved access to the countryside while protecting the legitimate rights of those who live and work there. In September 1995 he joined the then Shadow Environment Secretary, Frank Dobson MP, and President of the Ramblers Association, Janet Street-Porter at a rally at Penistone Hill Country Park near Haworth to promote "Open Britain Day". He joined others in calling for greater public access to moorland and open country.

The massive Boulsworth Hill marks the eastern boundary of his Pendle constituency. In the 1950s there was not even a footpath over a four and a half mile length of moorland at Boulsworth Hill. All footpaths ended at the foot of the moor. There was a public inquiry on 20 and 21 March 1956 and the public were told they could gaze at Boulsworth Hill from the road. When the Inquiry Report went to the Minister he ordered the County Council to establish a footpath along the top of the hill. There was plenty of resistance from landowners and it took another twenty two years for a three mile long U shaped permissive (ie no legal right of access) path to the summit to be agreed.

The new Government is to issue a consultation paper on access to land later this year.

For Immediate Release. No 268/97 Thursday 11 September 1997

DENTAL INEQUALITIES TO BE CUT WITH £9 MILLION BOOST TO NHS DENTAL SERVICES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the Government's latest initiative to boost NHS dentistry. In an announcement yesterday, the health Minister, Alan Milburn, said that inequalities and inaccessibility were to be tackled head. He said the new programme "Investing in Dentistry" will put a further £9 million into NHS dental services in England in the current financial year.

The Pendle MP said: "This is excellent news for North East Lancashire - an area I have previously described as a dental desert. Our dental health is among the worst in the country. In

Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale our children in fact do have the worst teeth in England."

"I have written to the chairman of the East Lancashire Health Authority, Bill Ashworth, asking for details of the bid he will be making for our share of this cash."

The Minister, Alan Milburn added: "The Government is concerned about the twin problems of inequalities in oral health and of access to NHS Dental Services. Improving oral health is especially important for children and young people. So inequality and inaccessibility must be tackled head on now as part of the Government's drive to modernise NHS services.

"The new programme will make additional cash available to areas of the country with insufficient numbers of dentists providing NHS dentistry, or where large number of patients aren't receiving satisfactory provision of NHS dental services. It will help patients get access to NHS dentists. It will also reduce health inequality."
More Follows

DENTAL INEQUALITIES TO BE CUT WITH £9 MILLION BOOST

"Dentists in the General Dental Service have made a huge contribution to improving the nation's oral health since the NHS began. The GDS is the main means of delivering dentistry in local communities, and we will continue to support and develop it. This investment is both a professional one, and a financial one. In areas with particular problems of accessibility, the Government intends to work with dentists by providing financial assistance to schemes which reduce these inequalities."

Health authorities will be asked to submit proposals for schemes which:

- expand existing practices or set up new ones so as to increase numbers of NHS registered patients, and give evidence that these patients are receiving top quality levels of care and treatment;

- give an assurance that participating dentists will maintain this commitment for a period of time linked to the type of grant received.

Notes to Editors

1. Guidance was issued to health authorities in England on 10 September.

2. Health authorities may submit applications immediately, and funding will be provided to dentists following approval of the scheme by the Secretary of State and its implementation by the health authority

3. Schemes likely to be approved will focus on investment in dental
practices, including for example:
- grants for expanding existing practices or setting up new practices
- training and back-to-work packages for dentists who have taken
career breaks
- start-up packages for emerging vocational trainees to set up in general practice.

For Immediate Release. No 269/97 Monday 15 September 1997

PHOTOCALLS: GORDON PRENTICE MP

Tuesday 16 September at 6.30pm: the MP will be attending the presentation and launch of Groundwork's 1997/8 East Lancashire prospectus. Venue: The Globe Centre, Accrington.

Tuesday 16 September at 8pm: the MP will be discussing with Kelbrook villagers the latest developments in the proposed Colne Foulridge Bypass. Venue: Kelbrook Village Hall

Thursday 18 September at 12.30pm: the MP will be speaking to the Barlick and Earby Rotary Club on the trials and tribulations of life as a Member of Parliament. Venue: Rolls Royce Social Club, Skipton Road, Barnoldswick.

Friday 19 September at 11am: the MP will be at Townley Hall, Burnley for the formal designation of the South Pennine Moors as a special protection area for the conservation of wild birds. The programme is being put together by the Standing Conference of South Pennine Authorities who will sign a memorandum

committing members to the care and protection and management of this area.

Saturday 20 September at 1pm. Friends of Pendle Community Hospital annual fete. Leeds Road, Nelson.

For Immediate Release. No 270/97 Monday 15 September 1997

ROLLS ROYCE GIVES EDGE END £5,000 TOWARDS CENTRE FOR CRICKET EXCELLENCE

The leading aerospace company and local employer, Rolls Royce, has donated £5,000 to Brierfield's Edge End School who are bidding to create a new regional centre of excellence for cricket. The move comes after the school head teacher, Martin Burgess, gave a presentation to the company, outlining his plans for the centre.

Commenting on the cash gift, the MP said: "I am thrilled to bits that the company was able to do this. I hope that with a flagship company such as Rolls Royce signed up, others will follow. I know that the company was very impressed by the presentation and by the enthusiasm the bid has engendered."

The MP added: "A cricket coaching centre would be an asset to the entire area and I am keeping my fingers crossed that the bid will get the support it deserves from the Sports Council and other organisations."

The General Manager of the company's Barnoldswick site, Peter Orcherton, told the MP: "Rolls Royce receive an enormous number of requests for assistance from a wide body of organisations and individuals in the course of a year and we cannot help everyone. However, we have given careful consideration to the project and we have recently written to the head teacher to offer £5,000 towards his plans for an East Lancashire Cricket Coaching Centre."

Note to Editors: The MP had earlier written to Rolls Royce chairman, Sir Ralph Robins, outlining plans for the centre. The Sports Minister, Tony Banks, is to visit the school in November.

For Immediate Release. No 271/97 Monday 15 September 1997

MP IN TALKS WITH BRITISH AEROSPACE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be meeting British Aerospace chiefs at Salmesbury today (Monday) for an update on key projects affecting the future of the aerospace industry in Lancashire. The Eurofighter project will be high on the agenda.

Speaking before the meeting today, the MP said: "Aerospace is vitally important to Lancashire and the North West and the new Government wants to do everything it can to support this key leading edge industry."

"In Pendle there are many BAe suppliers and they are obviously looking for reassurance that things are likely to go well in the long term. Big companies such a British Aerospace are absolutely central in promoting confidence. If things are going well with British Aerospace this feeds through to the suppliers. It is a virtuous circle."

For Immediate Release. No 272/97 Monday 15 September 1997

MP CALLS FOR MUTUAL HELP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to meet the Nelson based Marsden Building Society Chief Executive, Eddie Shapland, this Wednesday (17 September) in a move designed to show his support for the mutuals - the building societies who intend to stay as they are rather than convert into banks.

The MP said: "Eddie Shapland is a real champion of the mutual movement and this will be a good opportunity for us to discuss the new Government's policy in this area. I shall also want to discuss the very real housing problems we have in Pendle with its ageing and crumbling housing stock, much of which has outlived its usefulness."

The MP continued: "Nationwide Building Society members have recently sent a clear signal of their support for mutuality - and that is great news. It shows that not everyone will be tempted by the so-called "windfall gains". Indeed building societies give a

very good deal to savers and borrowers. Week after week, they feature strongly among the best buys."

"My colleague, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Helen Liddell, has told me she will be meeting the Building Societies Association shortly to see what can be learned from the stampede to convert. I shall certainly be feeding into the very heart of Government the views of my local building society."

SMALL RISE IN PENDLE JOBLESS

The number of people out of work in Pendle and claiming benefit last month rose to 1589 (4.3%) - up from 1511 (4.1%) in July. 1215 men were out of work (5.5%) and 374 (2.4%) women.

There were 191 vacancies at Colne Job Centre and 344 at Nelson.

Commenting on the latest figures, local MP, Gordon Prentice said "There has been a small rise in unemployment in the area, although we are well below the regional and national average. This trend over the summer months will change as students on the register return to their courses."

"We are going to do all we can to keep unemployment low in Pendle. We are committed to tackling long term unemployment and I have appointments with key agencies in the coming weeks to discuss the implementation of our new initiatives."

Note to Editors:

The MP will shortly be meeting with the regional Employment Service to discuss the implementation of the Government's "New Deal for the Young Unemployed" in Pendle. This offers four new opportunities to long term unemployed young people in this constituency as follows: (1) a job with an employer for 26 weeks including one day a week in education or training. (2) a job for 6 months in the new environmental taskforce, which will again release young people for a day's education (3) a job with a voluntary sector employer with day release (4) full time education on approved courses to improve employment prospects.

On 16 September, the MP attended the launch of the 1997-8 prospectus for "Groundwork" in Accrington who will play a part in coordinating the new environmental taskforce in this region.

For Immediate Release. No 274/97 Monday 15 September 1997

MP TUNES IN

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is tuning in to a new radio station serving Pendle and Burnley. Known as ***"Two Boroughs Radio" or 2BR*** the new station comes on air at 7am today, Monday 17 September. It offers a mix of music, news and information.

The MP said: "I am told we shall be getting an eclectic mix of 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s chart toppers with special features for soul, folk, Irish, country and classical. In fact, it sounds like something for everyone. There will be a What's On feature and news and magazine programmes from our own area. Add to this, local sports coverage and a Focus slot featuring the lives of local people."

The MP added: "It is about time we had our own radio station here."

Note to Editor: 2BR has a temporary licence until October 10 but hopes to get a full commercial licence. It will transmit 24 hours a day using Virgin radio broadcasts during the night.

For Immediate Release. No 275/97 Monday 6 October 1997

GOVERNMENT TO CONSULT ON BULL BARS

The decision by Roads Minister, Baroness Hayman, to consult the public on the future of bull bars has been applauded by local MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says that in an accident bull bars can do a tremendous amount of damage. "Modern vehicle design calls for crumple zones and such like to minimise injury. Bull bars are rigid with no give."

The consultation document seeks views on a number of options for controlling aggressive bull bars.

For new bull bars, these are: banning all metal bull bars; allowing only those bull bars, whether plastic or metal, which pass a test; allowing only those bull bars which have passed a test showing they are less aggressive than the vehicle they are intended for.

For existing bull bars, the options are: take no action; require the removal of all metal bull bars; requiring bull bars to be subjected to a test.

The consultation paper also addresses a number of other issues, including the current position in Europe, bull bars fitted to vehicles approved to the European external projections Directive, the scope for national action and how a ban would be enforced. Any test would be subject to discussion with industry.

Lady Hayman said: "I believe that effective action is necessary to protect pedestrians from being killed and injured by aggressive bull bars. We have strongly supported European proposals to tackle the bull bar issue, but unfortunately quick progress on this initiative now looks uncertain given the opposition of some other member states. I have therefore decided that we must look very seriously at national action."

more follows:

GOVERNMENT TO CONSULT ON BULL BARS

Gordon Prentice added: "Safety is a big consideration here. Some bull bars are very aggressive indeed and are wholly inappropriate for vehicles which are never likely to encounter rough terrain.

Bull bars can do a lot of damage especially to children. It is right that the Government is now consulting those who have an interest, ranging from road safety groups to bull bar manufacturers. This will be an open process aimed at identifying a way forward that is both practicable and effective."

The consultation will last for a 3 month period ending on 31 December 1997.

Notes to Editor: There has been public concern for some time that bull bars present a hazard to vulnerable road users. The UK participated actively in work in Europe which resulted in a draft amendment to the External Projections Directive being prepared by the Commission. This amendment would introduce test procedures for new bull bars and is intended to only permit designs of bull bars which do not increase the hazards to pedestrians. However, the draft amendment's future looks uncertain as several countries are taking the line that the technical standard was not sufficiently scientific and it would be

best to wait for the procedures developed for a comprehensive but longer term Directive on pedestrian protection.

In view of the likelihood of the European initiative stalling, the Government has reviewed the scope for taking national action on bull bars. The consultation document sets out various options for national action which are consistent with European obligations to accept those bull bars approved to the external projections Directive.

For Immediate Release. No 276/97 Monday 6 October1997

MP BACKS MOVE TO GIVE MOBILE PHONE USERS A FAIR DEAL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing moves by the telecommunications watchdog OFTEL to allow mobile phone users to keep their number if they choose to switch operators. The MP says this allow greater competition in the mobile phone market and as such should be welcomed.

At the moment mobile operators do not allow customers to take their number with them if they change operators. According to OFTEL, this puts off customers from shopping around for the best deal and making a change.

The MP said: "Here in Pendle we have a few black holes when it comes to decent reception and I am anxious the technology is brought in stream as quickly as possible to give people here the same standards of service that apply elsewhere in the country. Number portability from next year will allow people to move between Cellnet, Vodafone, Orange, One2One and other operators and this is going to make a big difference. It will force them to get their act together."

The MP added: "It is about time that charges for using mobile phones started to come down. At the moment it costs an arm and a leg to use a mobile on a regular basis."

Notes To Editors: In 1996 the UK introduced number portability for fixed network residential and business customers. The UK is also the first country in Europe to introduce number portability for specially tariffed services such as freephone.

For Immediate Release. No 277/97 Monday 6 October 1997

PHOTOCALL: JOHN BATTLE MP

DTI Minister, John Battle, will be visiting Northern Technologies' Strategic Manufacturing Centre at Netherfield Road, Nelson this Friday, 10 October, between 10am and 11am.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has an engagement outside his Pendle constituency which clashes and will not, unfortunately, be able to accompany the Minister on his visit.

Speaking from his office in Nelson earlier today, the Pendle MP said: "It is important that Ministers in the new Government see what we are up in Pendle - especially when we are breaking new ground. John Battle is a key player in the DTI Ministerial team and I am delighted he is coming to town."

For Immediate Release. No 278/97 Monday 6 October 1997

ORDER! ORDER!

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is urging Pendle schools to have a go in the 1997/8 Motorola Youth Parliament Competition.

The competition, which is now in its seventh year, is sponsored by Motorola and the Citizenship Foundation. It aims to encourage a better understanding of Parliament and how Britain is governed.

Schools are invited to make a video up to 20 minutes long of a mock Parliamentary session to include a debate up to 15 minutes and a mock question time.

The MP said: "The Youth Parliament Competition encourages team work and builds self confidence. It involves developing technical and creative skills in putting together the video and, obviously, it promotes an understanding of how laws are made."

"All in all, it is an excellent idea and well worth supporting."

For Immediate Release. No 279/97 Tuesday 7 October 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP IS VISITING THE LANCASHIRE PROBATION SERVICE, Every Street, Nelson at 1.30pm on Tuesday 7th October.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will be dropping in on the Lancashire Probation Office at 63 Every Street, Nelson to meet Mr Ian Galbraith and the rest of the staff to hear about the work of the office and the special problems facing the Pendle area.

For Immediate Release. No 280/97 Wednesday 8 October 1997

MPs TELL HEALTH UNION:
"NHS IS TOP PRIORITY FOR LABOUR"

Local MPs, Gordon Prentice and Peter Pike, told a meeting of the health workers' union, Unison, that the NHS is a top priority for the new Government. Speaking to the meeting at Burnley General Hospital last night, the MPs acknowledged that demands on the NHS were increasing all the time but the Government would give the NHS and the people who work in it a fair deal.

The Pendle MP Gordon Prentice said: "The Government is actively looking at the reintroduction of national terms and conditions for NHS employees. It is ludicrous for different parts of the NHS to be competing against each other for staff."

The MPs also discussed the hospital building programme and the principles which the new Government will follow in appointing people to NHS bodies such as Trusts and health authorities.

Gordon Prentice said: "I want to see people who run the NHS live locally and use the NHS themselves. We want people with a real commitment to the NHS and who have something to offer."

The MPs were speaking as the Secretary of State for Health Frank Dobson told the autumn conference of the Chief Medical Officer, at the Civil Service College, Sunningdale that the NHS makes a major contribution to Britain's competitiveness by

improving the health of the workforce and by keeping down non-wage costs. Mr Dobson said: "For too long the National Health Service has been portrayed as a drain on the economy. It's not. It's a positive contributor to the economy."

More follows

"NHS IS TOP PRIORITY FOR LABOUR"

"For a start, the National Health Service - together with overall efforts to promote better health - contributes to the economy by giving Britain a workforce which is fit and well. Of course there is a lot more to be done; a lot of scope for further improvement. At present the Confederation of British Industry estimates that 187 million working days each year are lost through sickness, at a cost
of £12 billion to employers. We've got to get that down."

The Minister added: "Our NHS is remarkably efficient and gives good value for money. The NHS is financed from general taxation, and that helps employers in Britain. In many other developed countries, employers have to contribute directly to the cost of the healthcare of their workforce. And this is one of the reasons why their non-wage costs of employment are high, and ours are low."

Note to Editors: This evening (Wednesday) the Pendle MP will be visiting the Dialysis Unit at the Royal Preston Hospital before meeting the Preston and District Kidney Patients Association. The Association's area covers Pendle.

For Immediate Release. No 281/97 Wednesday 8 October 1997

MP SAYS ITS TOO HOT FOR COMFORT

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has warmly welcomed moves by the UK Government to arrest the spread of deserts across the world.

The MP's remarks follow the statement by Development Minister, George Foulkes, in Rome when he said the British Government would help tackle desertification, land degradation and drought.

Speaking to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Rome, the Minister said: "The poorest are most vulnerable to

environmental problems, whether local or international in origin. They are the main human casualties of desertification and land degradation. To address desertification and land degradation in these circumstances is to address poverty directly."

The Pendle MP added: "Every time I switch on my television there seems to be a programme on about droughts and deserts. Climate change is a real issue for people currently living on the margins. Every year the Sahara desert gobbles up more and more land. We really do need to act to save the planet. We need to put our money where our mouth is."

Note to Editors: Total UK commitments to address desertification, land degradation and drought during 1996/97 were about £61 million. Since April 1997, a further £21 million has been committed for similar projects.

For Immediate Release. No 282/97 Wednesday 8 October 1997

PENDLE MP WELCOMES EXTRA £100 MILLION FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the Prime Minister's £100 million pledge for schools to buy the latest technology and educational software to help the Government's standards' drive.

The new equipment will enable schools to access the National Grid for Learning, which the Prime Minister also launched today. The aim is to get all 32,000 of Britain's schools wired up to the Grid by the year 2002.

Speaking from his Pendle constituency office earlier today, the MP said: "Raising standards is the new Government's key priority and the Grid will play a major role in helping us meet the new targets for literacy and numeracy. It will allow pupils to work on networked facilities to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and receive feedback on their performance. It will also give them and their teachers the opportunity to use the Internet to access the best educational software and up-to-the-minute information on a whole range of subjects."

Education Secretary, David Blunkett added: "Teachers will need to be equipped to use the new technology. Over the next five years, Lottery money will be made available to train the existing

500,000 teachers In IT skills, ending once and for all the unease some teachers feel when using new technologies."

The Grid will provide: On-line versions of the curricula operating in various parts of the UK; A Virtual Teachers' Centre focusing on the professional development of teachers; Information enabling pupils to participate remotely in, for example, science experiments involving space technology which would otherwise be too expensive for the school to

PENDLE MP WELCOMES EXTRA £100 MILLION FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

carry out; A bulletin board for senior school managers; Information for parents on their child's school. The Grid will also give parents the opportunity to send messages to the school.

The Grid will be launched in time for the start of the 1998 academic year. In preparation, next year will be declared UK Net Year - a year-long drive by industry, co-ordinated by a public-private partnership, to raise the pace at which schools install the equipment they need to get on the Internet and access the Grid.

The Grid, which will feature prominently in the Millennium Dome, will eventually link schools, colleges, universities, libraries, adult
learning institutions, museums and galleries.

Mr Blunkett said: "Ultimately, the Grid, together with the University for Industry, will support my Department's commitment to lifelong learning and the creation of a learning society. It will create the 'connected society', improving the quality and availability of educational materials, and increasing and widening access to learning for everyone."

Note to Editors: Copies of the National Grid for Learning consultation document 'Connecting the Learning Society' can be obtained free of charge by calling 0845 60 222 60. Alternatively, the summary document will be on the Department for Education and Employment's Website address:
http://www.open.gov.uk/dfee/dfeehome.htm.

For Immediate Release. No 283/97 Monday 13 October1997

MP BACKS DRIVE TO ATTRACT MORE MAGISTRATES

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a new drive to attract people from all walks of life on to the bench. He says the magistracy should broadly reflect the wider community it serves.

The MP was speaking as the Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, told a meeting of the magistrates association that he wants to create a new tradition of service among people who would not normally see themselves as potential magistrates.

The Lord Chancellor said: "I want to create a new tradition of service among people who do not usually see themselves as potential magistrates. I also recognise how difficult a task it can be to balance the political and social composition of every Bench. It is no longer the case that Labour voters are restricted to Trade Unionists and the chattering classes. Labour voters are out there, in every walk of life, in every age group. It should not be too difficult to find them, and I expect them to be found. I also want Advisory Committees to do more to encourage candidates with disabilities and from the ethnic minorities."

Gordon Prentice added: "This is a very welcome move. I have been saying for years that the bench should be made more representative. Now the Lord Chancellor says his overriding priority is to achieve the right political and social balance. Lord Irvine has hit the ground running and his earlier decision to increase the upper age limit for appointment to the magistracy from fifty-five to sixty-five was well-received."

Notes for Editors: As at 1 January 1997 there were 30,374 magistrates (15,858 men: 14,516 women) serving in England and Wales, including the Duchy of Lancaster.

For Immediate Release. No 284/97 Tuesday 14 October 1997

PRENTICE HAILS CRACKDOWN ON LANDLORD FRAUD

Greedy landlords who milk millions of pounds in housing benefit fraud will be targeted in a new Government crackdown. The move has been welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice, who says tough action against cheating landlords is long overdue.

The Pendle MP was speaking as Fraud Minister, John Denham, outlined a six point programme to make it easier to both spot

and stop lawbreaking landlords and managing agents, who are part of a staggering £1 billion housing benefit scam.

The measures, which include three new proposals being implemented shortly, are:

* new powers to stop direct payments to landlords where fraud is suspected;

* new powers to suspend payment and make recovery of fraudulent overpayments easier;

* new powers to obtain information to identify all residential properties owned by those landlords suspected of impropriety who may receive direct payments of benefit - allowing greater cross matching of claimant data and quicker spotting of multiple fraud claims;

* data matching exercises to check claims and claimants across the benefits system and with other Government Departments;

* a trial to intercept Housing Benefit cheques redirected by landlords through the postal system.

more follows

* initiatives to shift the emphasis by local authorities from detection to prevention of fraud.

The Pendle MP said: "We are keeping our manifesto commitment to crack down on dishonesty and maintain action against all types of benefit fraud, including landlord fraud."

Note to Editors: Some recent successful prosecutions against fraudulent landlords include:

* a 12 months jail sentence against one landlord who swindled £11,600 in Housing Benefit;

* a 15 months prison term for a landlord whose false accounts included £6,000 in stolen Housing Benefit;

* Operation Rigsby which achieved 52 prosecutions and produced weekly benefit savings of around £1 million.

* a benefit/mortgage fraud sting in Scotland which uncovered nearly £100,000 in weekly benefit savings in just three months.

* a typical scam involved a customer who was in receipt of DSS and Housing Benefit falsely applying and receiving a £23,000 mortgage by giving false employment details. He then claimed Housing Benefit for the property from the LA by claiming to be a tenant at the property.

The Government's anti-fraud strategy is built on three principles: • fairness: restoring public confidence in a secure Social Security system which ensures that benefits go to those who need them, and not to those who seek to profit at the expense of the needy; • responsibility: fraud is anti-social behaviour which is contrary to responsible citizenship; assisting in the drive against fraud is an expression of responsible citizenship • honesty: ensuring public confidence in a Social Security system that deals effectively with those who act dishonestly.

The Government's six point programme includes three new sets of regulations which will enable authorities to obtain and assemble information from landlords and agents about them and any residential properties they own, control or manage, anywhere in the United Kingdom, which will make it easier to gather evidence in support of an investigation into fraud. The new powers should also help authorities to uncover multiple frauds from a single lead.

For Immediate Release. No 285/97 Tuesday 14 October 1997

MP URGES PENSIONERS TO TAKE UP BENEFITS

The latest estimates of the take-up of Income Related Benefits covering the year 1995/96, published this week, show good take-up rates across most benefits except for Income Support by pensioners.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "These figures of course cover a period under the last Conservative Government and the position for pensioners is very disquieting. The figures show that up to 1 million pensioners are not claiming the Income Support

to which they are entitled. Single female pensioners over the age of 75 appear to present the biggest challenge."

The MP added: "The Government is commissioning research to help understand why pensioners do not take up their entitlement so that we can find the best ways of getting help to them."

"For my part I would simply encourage anyone who is entitled to benefit to claim it. I want to special attention given to the poorest pensioners where there are particular problems with take up."

"These unclaimed benefits are there to be taken up. It is not charity to claim what is yours. I want to see Pendle's pensioners getting what they are entitled to."

Note to Editors: Take up of Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Family Credit. Taking all four benefits together, there was between £2,290 million and £3,550 million left unclaimed in 1995/96; this compares to £26,740 million that was claimed.

For Immediate Release. No 286/97 Tuesday 14 October 1997

OVER £2 BILLION IN UNCLAIMED BENEFITS (NOT SENT)

The Department of Social Security today published the latest estimates of the take-up of the main income related benefits in Great Britain : Housing Benefit, Income Support, Family Credit and Council Tax Benefit. All estimates relate to the financial year 1995/96.

Take-up is measured in two ways: by caseload and by expenditure. Caseload take-up compares the number of benefit recipients - averaged over the year - with the number who would be receiving if everyone took up their entitlement for the full period of their entitlement. Expenditure take-up compares the total amount of benefit received, in the course of a year, with the total amount that would be received if everyone took up their entitlement for the full period of their entitlement. So take-up would reach 100% only if all those eligible claimed, and did so for the full duration of their entitlement.

The key results are:

Housing Benefit Take-up

Total Housing Benefit take-up in 1995/96 was in the range 93% to 96%. Total amount of Housing Benefit left unclaimed by entitled people was between £410 million and £760 million. The average number of people leaving this benefit unclaimed was in the range 300,000 to 560,000. The total amount claimed was £9,410 million, claimed by 4.7 million recipients.

By family type, take-up of Housing Benefit appears highest among Lone Parents: in the range 98% to 100% by expenditure and 96% to 100% by caseload. Take-up by Pensioners appears to be lowest amongst the different family types at between 89% to 92% by expenditure and 86% to 89% by caseload.

By tenure type, take-up of Housing Benefit by LA Tenants is higher than that by Private Tenants: 94% to 97% compared to 91% to 94% by expenditure respectively and 91% to 96% compared to 86% to 91% by caseload respectively.

Overall, the pattern of take-up of Housing Benefit in 1995/96 is very similar to that in 1994/95 and it cannot be concluded that take-up has risen or fallen.

Entitled non-recipients tend to have smaller entitlements to Housing Benefit than recipients. It appears that recipients of Income Support are much more likely to take-up their entitlement to Housing benefit than their non-recipient counterparts.

Income Support Take-up. Total Income Support take-up in 1995/96 was in the range 88% to 92% by expenditure and 76% to 82% by caseload.

Total amount of Income Support left unclaimed was between £1,210 million and £1,870 million. The average number of people entitled to Income Support and yet not claiming it was in the range 1.17 million and 1.68 million. This compares to 5.3 million people claiming £13,920 million worth of Income Support.

By family type, take-up was lowest for Pensioners at between 72% and 78% by expenditure and at between 60% and 66% by caseload. Take-up of Income Support by Lone Parents is probably the highest at between 98% to 100% by expenditure and at between 96% and 100% by caseload.

Overall, take-up of Income Support is much the same in 1995/96 as it was in 1994/95 by both expenditure and caseload.

As with Housing Benefit, the amounts of Income Support left unclaimed by entitled non-recipients tend to be smaller than the amounts actually claimed. Some entitled non-recipients of Income Support had significant amounts of other income (besides Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit): 34% of all single entitled non-recipients had other income exceeding £75 per week; 59% of all couples had other income exceeding £100 per week. Some entitled non-recipients shared households with other benefit units and may have been sharing resources with them as well. Overall, 34% of entitled non-recipients lived in households of this type.

Council Tax Benefit Take-up: Total Council Tax Benefit take-up for 1995/96 was in the range 76% to 84% by expenditure and 74% to 82% by caseload.

Total amount of Council Tax Benefit left unclaimed by entitled non-recipients was in the range #370 million to #620 million. The average number of people entitled yet not claiming, was between 1.2 million and 2.0 million. There were 5.6 million recipients accounting for #1,960 million of Council Tax Benefit.

By family type, in common with both Income Support and Housing Benefit, take-up of Council Tax Benefit appears to be lowest amongst Pensioners: 68% to 76% by expenditure and 66% to 74% by caseload; and highest amongst Lone Parents: 91% to 96% by expenditure and 90% to 96% by caseload.

By tenure type, take-up is highest amongst local authority Tenants: at least 90% by expenditure and at least 88% by caseload. Take-up is lowest amongst owner occupiers: at least 57% by expenditure and at least 54% by caseload.

Overall, take-up of Council Tax Benefit appears to have increased between 1994,195 and 1995/96 by both expenditure and caseload.

The weekly entitlements of Council Tax Benefit were lower than those
of other income related benefits, the average weekly unclaimed amount
being around #6. This could help to explain why some entitled non-recipients do not claim their benefit. It appears that take up of Council Tax Benefit is higher amongst those who already claim other benefits.

Family Credit Take-up

Total Family Credit Take-up in 1995/96 was 83% by expenditure and
70% by caseload.

Total amount of Family Credit left unclaimed was £300 million. The
average number of entitled non-recipients was 240,000. 540,000 people received £1,450 million worth of Family Credit.

By family type, take-up by single parents was higher at 91% by expenditure and 80% by caseload than for couples at 76% by expenditure and 62% by caseload.

The 1995/96 estimates suggest that there has been little change in
Family Credit take-up in recent years.

Overall take-up: Taking all four benefits together, there was between £2,290 million and £3,550 million left unclaimed in 1995/96; this compares to £26,740 million that was claimed which represents take-up by
expenditure of between about 88% and 92%. There were between 2.9
million and 4.5 million entitled non-recipients compared to 16.2 million recipients. This represents take-up by caseload of between
about 78% and 85%.

For Immediate Release. No 287/97 Tuesday 14 October 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP will be speaking on rural development issues at the Pendle Heritage Centre at on Thursday 16 October

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be speaking on "Rural Issues and the New Government" at a one day Conference organised by Rural Signpost and sponsored by Business Link and the Heritage Trust for the North West.

The MP will say: "The new Labour Government has a wide ranging agenda which will impact on rural areas. We want to see a living, working and thriving countryside. Over the next few years we shall see the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and a new emphasis given to environmental issues. I also want to see a new emphasis given to tackling hidden poverty in rural areas."

For Immediate Release. No 288/97 Wednesday 15 October 1997

MISSED THE BUS? THE MP WANTS TO KNOW!

The performance of the bus company Stagecoach is to be put under the microscope by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP wants to hear from constituents with reports of buses that don't turn up on time and gaps in timetabled services.

The MP, who is Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Transport Minister, says he has received a stream of complaints about bus services since Pendle Council triggered the sale of the local municipal bus company to the controversial bus operator Stagecoach.

Speaking from his constituency office earlier today the MP said: "I want to hear from local people who have been left hanging around bus stops for ages waiting for buses that don't arrive. Each complaint will be followed up by me. I have complaints in my in- tray about buses running from Barnoldswick to Earby and from Barlick to Barrowford. The 78 service has been axed and other discontinued routes include the 64 and 68."

"On 6 March 1996 we were assured by the Leader of Pendle Council that *"bus travellers will find during the coming year that the same number of buses are running on the same routes at the*

same fares with the same drivers who will be getting the same wages." Tragically, 18 months on that no longer seems to be the case. The Government is determined to ensure that the bus industry will be regulated to give a decent service to passengers."

Note to Editors: Pendle Council's Policy Committee will be considering the Government consultation paper on the Integrated Transport Strategy (which includes bus regulation) at its meeting tomorrow (Thursday). The council has set up a bus service provision working group to monitor Stagecoach.

For Immediate Release. No 289/97 Wed 15 October 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS FALLS

The number of people out of work and claiming benefit in Pendle last month fell by 0.5% from 4.3% to 3.8%. There were 1426 people out of work in September compared to 1589 in August. 1102 men (5%) were out of work and 324 women (2.1%).

Commenting on the latest figures, local MP, Gordon Prentice said "It is encouraging that the unemployment figures are improving and I would like to see it continue. We are still below the national and regional average, but I hope to see more improvements in the months to come. In the medium term, I am confident that the government's 'Welfare to Work' programme will have a positive effect on this area and lead more people back to work."

On the news that unemployment nationally has fallen to a 17 year low of 1,467,600, the MP had this to say: "I'm pleased to see that unemployment is falling, but I understand the scepticism of the public about the integrity of the figures after all the fiddling during the Tory years. We need to look carefully at how the figures are calculated and restore confidence in them."

For Immediate Release. No 290/97 Tuesday 1 August 1997

FIREWORKS RICHARD

For Immediate Release. No 291/97 Tuesday 1 August 1997

NHS FUNDING - RICHARD

For Immediate Release. No 292/97 Monday 27 October 1997

MP CALLS FOR NEW CONTROLS ON LASER PENS

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice is calling on the Government to put tough new controls on laser pens - the latest craze to grip the nation's teenagers. He says the high intensity beam of laser light can cause temporary blindness and disorientation. In the wrong hands the gadgets could cause serious eye injury.

The MP is backing calls by firefighters, the police and a growing number of doctors who are demanding the laser pens are outlawed.

The laser pens - which can be bought for less than £20 - can project a thin red beam of light up to 200 feet. They have reportedly been used by young men to single out, target and intimidate girls at discos, temporarily blind bus drivers and dazzle footballers.

The MP added: "It is blindingly obvious the sale of these laser pens should be controlled. They are potentially lethal."

"Our eyes are precious and we shouldn't mess around with them."

For Immediate Release. No 293/97 Tuesday 28 October 1997

MP WANTS PROPERTY SALE PRICES MADE PUBLIC

The price paid for a house or land should be made publicly available says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says this would help keep the lid on property prices and would not constitute "a nosy Parker's charter".

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP said: "We have seen people in the past made an absolute killing on the sale and resale of property. If sale prices had to be registered it would not stop people making their own decisions about what price to buy or sell but it would make for a much more informed property market. I think this proposal which is being floated by the Lord Chancellor has a lot going for it and should be supported."

Under the previous Government, the Land Registry issued a consultation paper to try to find out what support there was for including in the land register for England and Wales (which has been open to public inspection since 1990) the price paid for land or property on the most recent sale.

The MP added: "There were some strong objections in 1993 which killed the proposal then. Now the new Government is taking a fresh look at the issue. In many countries such as Scotland the price paid for a particular property is a matter of public record and this hasn't caused any problems. Here in England, the price is already public where land is sold at auction."

Note to Editors: Between 1898 and 1976 the Land Registry was under a duty "whenever practicable" to enter in the register, on first registration of the land and on subsequent changes of ownership, the price paid or value stated. Copies of the consultation paper are available from HM Land Registry, 32 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PH or from web site: http://www.open.gov.uk/landreg/home.htm The closing date for comments is Friday, December 12, 1997.

For Immediate Release. No 294/97 Tuesday 28 October 1997

MP BACKS CALL TO CURB WIND FARMS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing a call by the Countryside Commission for a re-think on Government policy on wind farms. The Commission - seen as the guardian of the countryside is urging the Government to discourage proposals for large scale wind energy schemes in England's finest landscapes, such as the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the National Parks.

The MP said: "Wind farms can be a terrible blot on the horizon - visible for miles around. They can too easily industrialise the landscape. I want to see the Government look at offshore schemes which can harness windy conditions out at sea."

Planning Minister Richard Caborn has told the Commission that there is a presumption in current Government guidance against visible power generation in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The MP added: "Here in Pendle we have some of the nation's finest landscapes on our doorstep. Just like the Green Belt, these landscapes need protection against inappropriate development."

Note to Editors: Contracts for the development of renewable energy technologies are awarded by Government in tranches. The DTI has recently sought views on the way in which the fifth tranche of contracts should be structured. There are 116 wind energy schemes with awards from previous rounds which are still to come forward as planning applications in England and Wales.

For Immediate Release. No 295/97 Tuesday 28 October 1997

GOVERNMENT TO CLARIFY LAW ON "LIVING WILLS"

News that the Government is to review the law on mental incapacity has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He says medical advances have left the law behind and a fresh look at this controversial area of law is needed.

The MP said: "Medical science can keep people alive these days who would never have survived before. This inevitably brings us face to face with ethical issues which must be squarely addressed. I therefore welcome the Government's decision to consult on the Law Commission's report on mental incapacity before introducing legislation. The issues raised are sensitive and many people feel very strongly about them. These are matters too important just to be left to the politicians."

The MP added: "The Law Commission's Report does not make any recommendations concerning euthanasia. The Government's view, which I share, is in line with the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics, that euthanasia cannot be sanctioned in any circumstances."

Notes for Editors. The Law Commission's study revealed an urgent need for reform in this area of law. It suggested that such legal provision as exists for substitute decision-making was out of step with modern social conditions and with the present-day understanding of the rights and needs of those who lack decision-making capacity; the existing law to protect vulnerable people who are at risk of harm was outdated and ineffective, allowing people's civil rights to be ignored without proper justification; and although advance agreements or "living wills"

currently have full force in law, there was a need for legislation to clarify the position in this area.

For Immediate Release. No 296/97 Tuesday 28 October 1997

ROAD TAX CHEATS TO BE CLAMPED IN NEW DRIVE AGAINST UNLICENSED VEHICLES

A big clamp down against drivers who do not pay their road tax is to get underway in Lancashire next Monday (3 November). Lancashire and the rest of the North West will be the first region outside London to be covered by the national scheme to wheelclamp unlicensed vehicles.

Clamping and removal will be carried out by contractors working with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "It is about time tax dodgers were brought to book. Like most people, I find it absolutely infuriating that seasoned car tax dodgers can seemingly escape prosecution for months on end. All that is now going to change."

The MP added: "My own view is that we should clamp and then crush. Handing back an untaxed vehicle crushed to the size of a tea chest would undoubtedly ensure prompt payment next time."

Note to Editors: The scheme is aimed at the more determined and longer term evader rather than those who are a few days late. A link with the DVLA national vehicle register will help contractors to target the more determined evaders. Special arrangements will be in place to cater for emergencies.

For Immediate Release. No 297/97 Tuesday 28 October 1997

NEW SECURITY MEASURES IN PLACE AT BARLICK'S BENEFITS AGENCY OFFICE

New security measures are in now place at the Benefits Agency Public Caller Office in Barnoldswick designed to calm fears among staff that working in the allegedly isolated office was altogether

too risky. The move was triggered by aggressive behaviour by a member of the public in another BA office.

The Barlick Office closed down temporarily to allow a risk assessment to be made and it re-opened on 10 October. The assessment made four recommendations to reduce the high risk rating. There is now a passive infra red sensor at the public entrance to the office and staff have personal alarms. Other measures have also been taken.

Local MP Gordon Prentice commented: "I am pleased that things have been sorted out and the office is back open for business. The Benefits Agency is still to come to a view about the future of the Barlick office but they are well aware of my own position. I want that office to stay in town."

Note to Editors: The Benefits Agency in Blackburn wrote to the Pendle MP on 8 August asking for his views on the proposed closure of the Barlick office. The MP replied on 15 August saying he was dismayed by the proposal. He said: *"I cannot understand, for the life of me, why a medium size town such as Barnoldswick, with over 10,000 people, should have to lose so may of its public services and amenities, as if Colne were next door. In fact Colne must be a good five miles away from Barnoldswick... I would be very much opposed to its closure."*

For Immediate Release. No 298/97 Sunday 2 November 1997

RESIGNATIONS OVER EUROPE COULD SPLIT TORY PARTY SAYS PRENTICE

The resignation this weekend of shadow agriculture minister and Skipton and Ripon MP, David Curry, could signal the break up of the Conservative Party according to his next door constituency neighbour, Pendle's Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from his Barnoldswick home earlier today the Pendle MP said: "In the space of one week we have seen the resignation from the Conservative Party of my predecessor John Lee who represented Pendle in Parliament for 13 years until 1992. Now it is the turn of David Curry to resign from the Opposition front bench on the grounds that the Conservatives under William

Hague risk leaving them *"marooned by events, marginalised in debate and alienated from sections of the electorate".*"

The MP added: "The Conservatives are all over the shop on the European issue. Labour will never take Britain into a Single European Currency if it is against our national economic interest. But if the Government believes it will be good for Britain and bring increased prosperity it will say so - leaving the final decision to the British people in a referendum."

"We need seriously to look at all the pros and cons of a single currency but to rule it out for a minimum of 10 years as the Tory opposition has just done is plain daft."

For Immediate Release. No 299/97 Monday 3 November 1997

PENDLE'S YOUNG PEOPLE GET A VOICE AT WESTMINSTER

Young people from all over Lancashire will be visiting Westminster this Wednesday (5 November) as part of the National Youth Work Week. The theme is "Giving Young People a Voice".

No fewer than 18 young people from Pendle will be joining local MP, Gordon Prentice, who will be pitching in with other Lancashire MPs to tell the young people about the role of the MP and the Parliamentary process. Pendle Borough Councillor and manager of the Brierfield youth centre, Sarah Hill, will be with the Pendle contingent.

The Pendle MP commented: "I always look forward to these visits. Young people are pretty good value for money. They enjoy a laugh and bring a fresh and often critical eye to old problems and ancient institutions!"

Note to Editors: This is the 5th Youth Work Week. The theme this year is "Finding a Voice". It is up to young people and those who work with them to interpret this as they wish. Tom Wylie, the Chief Executive of the NYA, explained it this way: "Everyone is free to exploit the week as they see fit, but we feel that there are benefits from national approach and the flexibility offered by this theme goes to the heart of youth service activity. You could choose to interpret it, for example, with a focus on effective communication or on self expression through poetry, drama or visual art. Or you could focus on the forums, structures and

practices that give young people genuine decision making power. Whatever you do the message we hope you will get across to the wider public is the huge benefits that can come from young people's involvement with the youth service - self confidence, self esteem, new skills, friendship and a chance to influence their communities."

For Immediate Release. No 300/97 Thursday 9 October 1997

DEFENCE (RICHARD)

For Immediate Release. No 301/97 Monday 3 November 1997

PUTTING EAST LANCS ON THE MAP

A top level meeting between the Director of the East Lancashire Partnership, John Tilley, and the area's MPs takes place tomorrow (Tuesday) at Westminster. The aim will be to maximise the benefit to East Lancashire from emerging Government initiatives.

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice said: "There are lots of opportunities and challenges facing the area - but problems aplenty too. But, speaking with one voice for the whole area, we have a lot of clout and we've got to use it."

The meeting will look at the development of the Partnership and at the SRB programme. Other topics will include the Government's New Deal, European funds, East Lancashire's housing problems and the proposed University of Industry.

For Immediate Release. No 302/97 Monday 3 November 1997

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be attending the Remembrance Day parades in Colne, Nelson and Barnoldswick on Sunday, 9 November.

The first parade leaves the Royal British Legion, Keighley Road, Colne at 10.30am.

For Immediate Release. No 303/97 Tuesday 4 November 1997

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE TO VISIT PENDLE

The President of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett, is to come to Pendle on Monday 1 December. The Minister will visit the Pendle Business Centre and have a meeting with the Consortium of Lancashire Aerospace.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "I am delighted that Margaret will be coming to Pendle - hot on the heels of her Energy Minister, John Battle."

"Aerospace is absolutely vital for the economic health and prosperity of the North West. It is clearly important for Margaret to hear first hand from people working in the industry in the area."

For Immediate Release. No 304/97 Wednesday 5 November 1997

HOUSING MINISTER TO VISIT PENDLE

Housing Minister, Hilary Armstrong, is to visit Pendle on Wednesday 19 November to see at first hand the state of much of the area's housing stock.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "I am delighted that Hilary has been able to take up my invitation to come to Pendle. There are hundreds of local authorities all over the country clamouring for a visit and I am naturally pleased that she will be with us later this month. We have some of the worst housing in the country here and it is important that Ministers are aware of the daunting scale of the problem."

An astonishing 57% of the housing stock was built before 1919 - more than anywhere else in the country. It is little wonder it needs a major overhaul. The dreadful decrepit state of much of Lancashire's housing stock was highlighted in July 1993 in a seminal report by the then Bishop of Burnley, the Rt Revd Ronald Milner, and his Inquiry team. It is perfectly clear that a tremendous amount of work remains to be done."

Note to Editors: Pendle has one of the highest rates of home ownership in the country. 86% of the housing stock is private (75% for the North West Region and 76% for England). In the

private sector in Pendle, tenure breaks down as follows: 92% owner occupied (87% NW region and 84% England) and 8% rented (13% NW region and 16% England).

Pre-l919 terraced housing provides 38.1% of the county's private sector stock compared to 29.3% for the UK as a whole. In Blackburn, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale over 50% of the private sector housing stock was built before 1919.

For Immediate Release. No 305/97 Wednesday 5 November 1997

SHOCKING STATISTICS

News that 553 people were killed in electrical incidents in Great Britain between 1990-1995 has shocked local MP, Gordon Prentice. In 1995 alone there were 121 serious electrical fires, costing more than £45 million in insurance claims.

The MP said: "These are, quite literally, electrifying statistics unearthed by the Health and Safety Executive. We need to do much more to remind people of the hazards of electricity. We are so used to using it we can too easily forget about the dangers."

The MP added: "We have a lot of old properties in Pendle and the electrical wiring is often as old as the house itself."

"It is always a good idea to check out domestic circuits."

For Immediate Release. No 306/97 Thursday 6 November 1997

MP BACKS MOVE TO TIGHTEN UP GAS REGULATIONS

Proposals by the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) for new Regulations to protect people from carbon monoxide poisoning have been warmly welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP is backing a campaign at Westminster to crack down hard on landlords who neglect to maintain gas appliances. The MP said: "Every year we hear of tragic cases where people have been poisoned by leaking gas from faulty fires, water heaters and cookers. These deaths are avoidable if landlords and others take their responsibilities seriously."

The MP added: "Each year about 30 people die from carbon monoxide poisoning and another 5 -10 from fires and explosions involving dangerous gas appliances."

Note to Editors: The draft Regulations clarify, update and consolidate requirements in the existing Regulations, and tighten controls in certain areas. The main changes are to:

- clarify the meaning of "work on a gas fitting" and as a consequence
clarify where certain requirements (e.g. registration with the Council
for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI)) are applicable;

- extend existing duties to require any person in control of work on
a gas fitting (including contractors and building service engineers) to ensure that operatives are competent for the particular activities involved;

- prohibit the future installation of any instantaneous water heater
which is not room-sealed or fitted with a device to shut off the appliance before a dangerous quantity of fumes can build up;

For Immediate Release. No 307/97 Wed 12 November 1997

MP PLEDGES NEW DRIVE TO SETTLE COMPENSATION CLAIMS AS FRENCH TRUCKERS DISPUTE ENDS

The settlement of the French lorry drivers dispute should be the green light for settling the outstanding claims for compensation from UK hauliers says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP says it is quite appalling that claims following last year's dispute are still outstanding.

French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin said last Friday, at the Anglo-French summit, that a reply would be given within three months to all outstanding claimants for compensation.

Transport Minister, Gavin Strang, commented: "Lionel Jospin's statement last week was encouraging. Many British hauliers were severely affected by last year's dispute. I hope we are now going to see an end to months of uncertainty. I hope that all claims will

be dealt with sympathetically and that those that qualify will be settled as soon as possible.

The Pendle MP added: "Many British hauliers have been put through the mangle financially. As of last week, only 5 claims out of 1,200 had been settled. The total claim amounts to a staggering £1.8m."

"I want to see all claims dealt with constructively and efficiently."

Note to Editors: Last years UK hauliers made 554,000 round trips to the Continent.

For Immediate Release. No 308/97 Monday 10 November 1997

EAST LANCS HOUSING SUMMIT

The visit to Pendle next week by Housing Minister, Hilary Armstrong, will allow leading councillors from Burnley, Accrington and other neighbouring areas to speak with one voice to the Government says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP, who will welcome the Minister to his constituency on 19 November, says he wants the meeting to be "a mini housing summit" for East Lancashire.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today the MP said: "We certainly have our problems in Pendle but across a whole swathe of East Lancashire much of our housing is in a lamentable condition. I want the Government to address the problems of the region and not simply in my own patch."

"It is as plain as a pikestaff that the housing problems of Pendle or Burnley or Accrington are not unique to those areas. We all have the crippling legacy of our industrial past to cope with."

The MP added: "Too much of our housing is past its sell by date."

For Immediate Release. No 309/97 Tuesday 11 November 1997

MP URGES 'CASE BY CASE APPROACH" TO PAVEMENT OBSTRUCTIONS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, says there should be no indiscriminate area-wide blitz on pavement obstructions in future and more sensitivity is required when enforcing the highways regulations.

The MP was speaking at Westminster after raising the matter with Planning Minister, Nick Raynesford. Last month there was a storm of protest across his Pendle constituency when "A Boards" and other alleged obstructions were removed from pavements and confiscated. They were subsequently returned to traders.

The MP asked the Minister if he would issue further guidance to local authorities concerning the exercise of their powers to keep pavements free of advertising boards and goods for sale. The Minister said powers were already available to councils but these should be exercised on "a case by case basis."

Prentice said: "The case by case approach must be right. It is quite absurd to have a complete blanket ban, blind to local circumstances such as the width of the pavement. In future there must be no buck passing or name calling. I want to see this issue being dealt with in a calm, responsible and common sense way."

Note to Editors: The Minister said: "There is sufficient guidance to local planning authorities on control of outdoor advertisements in the Department's Circular 5/92, using powers in the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. Local Highway Authorities have powers in the Highways Act 1980 to remove obstructions on pavements. Both planning and highway authorities must consider whether to exercise these powers on a case by case basis."

For Immediate Release. No 310/97 Wed 12 November 1997

MP WELCOMES NEW GUIDE ON HOW COUNCILS CAN TACKLE RUN DOWN PRIVATE HOUSING

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, today welcomed the publication of a new good practice guide which shows how councils have a vital role to play in helping to improve run down private housing.

Across the country authorities have been working in partnership

with home owners and businesses in schemes that embrace energy efficiency and care in the community, and link into Government regeneration backed projects. Some of the best practices are highlighted in the Government's new guide: Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategies.

Housing Minister Hilary Armstrong - who is visiting Pendle next Wednesday, 19 November for an East Lancashire Housing Summit - says private sector housing renewal strategies are a vital part of local authorities' housing programmes.

Pendle MP Gordon Prentice added: "Here in East Lancashire we have more people who own their homes outright or are buying them than almost anywhere else in England but the standard of much of the housing stock is very poor indeed. I am very keen to see the Government firing on all cylinders when it comes to private sector housing renewal strategies."

Notes to Editor: Circular 17/96 (Private Sector Renewal: A Strategic Approach) gives local housing authorities guidance on the development of private sector housing renewal strategies, taking into account the renovation grant and other provisions for securing the improvement of privately owned housing that were introduced under Part I of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

For Immediate Release. No 311/97 Thurs 13 November 1997

PENDLE JOBLESS DOWN AGAIN

The number of people unemployed and claiming benefit in Pendle has fallen again this month to 1267 (3.4%) from 1426 (3.8%) last month, There are 969 men (4.4%) out of work and 298 women (1.9%).

There are 224 unfilled vacancies at Colne JobCentre and 593 at Nelson.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the fall in the unemployment figures. "Nationally, the unemployment figures have continued to improve since the new Government was elected in May. I am glad to see this improvement reflected in our own unemployment figures here in Pendle."

"Labour is making a priority issue of getting people back into work equipped with the skills they need to do a good job. Our "welfare to work" plans are going well and will be of real benefit to this area when they kick in next year."

The MP added: "We will also be working towards an effective employment policy in Europe at the summit next month."

For Immediate Release. No 312/97 Wed 12 November 1997

MP WELCOMES NEW MEASURES TO OPEN UP QUANGOS

Radical new proposals to make quangos more open, accountable and effective, and to control their numbers, have been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

Publishing the "Opening Up Quangos" consultation paper the Public Services Minister Dr Clark said: "The Government is determined to make quangos more accountable for what they do, more open in how they do it and more effective in achieving their aims."

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: "Under the Tories there was an enormous proliferation of secret, unaccountable quangoes and we are now hacking back the quango undergrowth to give democracy some daylight."

The consultation paper reviews the main criticisms made of quangos and the policies the Government already has in hand to address many of them.

Note to Editors: The consultation paper's main proposals are as follows.

* To keep the number of quangos to a minimum, Ministers are to take
a personal look at the need for the quangos they sponsor; and each
quango is to undergo a rigorous review every five years, to establish whether their functions are still required.

* To make quangos more accountable, they should produce and make

publicly available Annual Reports; hold meetings in public, such as
arranging annual open meetings, where practicable; and release summary reports of meetings - for example, by press releases.

Parliamentary Select Committees are also to be invited to have greater oversight of quangos, by considering their annual reports and being involved in their five-yearly reviews.

more follows:

MP WELCOMES NEW MEASURES TO OPEN UP QUANGOS

The remit of Sir Len Peach, the Commissioner for Public Appointments,
to be extended to other bodies which are not quangos - nationalised
industries, public corporations and the regulators.

* To make quangos more open, information about appointments will be
published on the Internet, available for the first time from a single
Internet source. This will cover all quangos, as well as public corporations and nationalised industries.

Codes of Practice and Registers of interest for Board members are to
be applied to quangos wherever possible.

Further action to be taken to encourage women to apply for appointments to boards of quangos, and to increase ethnic minority
representation.

* To make quangos more efficient, performance reports on the larger
executive bodies are being published for the first time. This will be an annual publication and will be expanded to cover more quangos.

For Immediate Release. No 313/97 Wed 19 November 1997

MP BACKS BOOST TO BRITAIN'S RAILWAYS not sent

As the consultation period ends on the Government's ITS blah blah, local MP, Godon Prentice, called for a new emphasis on the nation's railways. Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the Pendle MP said: "The last Government ubder investeed fragmented etc

Earlier this montyh the Government announced a package of measures to boost investment in Britain's railways, protect passengers' rights, and make sure private operators provide high quality services.

The new measures included a new set of Objectives for the rail Franchising Director - making his principal aim to win more passengers onto the railway;

a new set of guidelines on railway investment which highlight the environmental and social benefits that rail services can provide; and

a voluntary Concordat with the independent Rail Regulator - providing a sound basis for co-operation and communication in the public interest.

Outlining the new measures, Dr Strang said:

-Britain deserves better from its railways. Today's package is the first step towards putting passengers' interests at the heart of the railways. With publication of the new Objectives for the Franchising Director, the railways will be free to concentrate on what really matters: investment in decent trains and stations; high standards of punctuality and reliability and protection of passengers' rights.

-In the short term, we have no choice but to operate within the regulatory system we have inherited. But I am determined to make that system work as far as possible in the interests of passengers.

The Franchising Director's new Objectives, and planning criteria, and the Concordat with the Rail Regulator signal the long term direction of our rail policy towards investment, integration and quality."

Franchising Director's Objectives

The new Objectives, Instructions and Guidance (OIG), laid before Parliament today, will make it the Franchising Director's principal aim to win more passengers on to the railway, secure improvements in the quality of rail services, and manage franchise contracts tightly in the public interest. He will no longer have a remit to privatise passenger railway services, but instead will be required to consult Ministers before taking steps to re-tender any franchise.

The new Objectives make it clear that, in enforcing contracts, the Franchising Director should put the interests of passengers first. He will be:

expected to provide full briefings to Ministers whenever serious breaches of franchise contracts are in prospect;

required to maintain existing safeguards on passenger rights, and
have new duties to promote facilities for disabled people and to improve passenger security;

obliged to publish regular information about the operational performance of franchisees.

The new OIG places considerable emphasis on investment in the railway, and on the Franchising Director's role in developing partnerships with local authorities and other potential promoters of
rail schemes.

OPRAF Planning Criteria

Alongside the Franchising Director's new Objectives, the new approach to rail investment, Appraisal of Support for Passenger Rail
Services - Planning Criteria : An Interim Guide, will be published this week by the Franchising Director. The guide sets out a new system for assessing the costs and benefits of rail schemes - including extra services and new investment in rail facilities. These criteria will give due weight to the social and environmental
benefits which railway investment can provide as part of the Government's integrated transport policy.

Concordat

Dr Strang also announced that he had today signed a voluntary Concordat with the Rail Regulator.

The main features of the Concordat are:

a statement of the Government's objectives for the rail industry, including: winning more passengers and freight to rail; operation of the railways as a network fully integrated with other forms of transport; the establishment of more effective and accountable regulation; increasing passenger safety and security from crime; and enhanced facilities for disabled passengers;

a statement of the Regulator's aims and objectives, including: creating a better railway for passengers and freight customers, and securing better value for public funding authorities,
through effective regulation in the public interest; and

a framework of communication between Ministers, the Franchising Director and the Rail Regulator which acknowledges the
need for close co-operation and communication between them.

Notes for editors

1. The Franchising Director is a semi-independent statutory officer
established under the Railways Act 1993 and charged with letting and
managing franchise contracts for the passenger railway.

2. Under Section 5 of the Railways Act, the Secretary of State has the power to give the Franchising Director a set of formal Objectives, and to give him instructions and guidance on how these
Objectives should be fulfilled. The Objectives, Instructions and Guidance (OIG) are a public document, laid before Parliament. The
most recent OIG was issued by the previous Government, in November
1996.

3. Appraisal of Support for Passenger Rail Services - Planning Criteria: An Interim Guide, is being sent to industry bodies, including the Rail Regulator, train operating companies, rail user groups, and local authority associations. It is available from Tim

Senior, OPRAF, Golding's House, 2 Hay's Lane, London, SE1 2HB.

4. The Rail Regulator is an independent statutory officer, appointed
by Ministers under the Railways Act 1993 and charged with promoting
and protecting the interests of railway users. The Rail Regulator's
duties are set out by statute, rather than by Ministers.
The Concordat does not prejudice the Regulator's independence.
Copies of the Concordat are available from the DETR Press Office or
the Office of the Rail Regulator.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mrs Helen Brinton (Lab, Peterborough)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the
Regions when he intends to issue new Objectives, Instructions and
Guidance to the Rail Franchising Director. (14614)

DR GAVIN STRANG

I have today written to the Franchising Director, enclosing a new
set of Objectives, Instructions and Guidance, issued to him under
Section 5 of the Railways Act 1993. Copies of my letter and of the
Objectives, Instructions and Guidance have been laid before the
House and also placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER 1997
14614/97/98
DETR
(47)

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mrs Helen Brinton (Lab, Peterborough)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the
Regions when the Franchising Director intends to publish his

criteria for the appraisal of passenger railway services.

DR GAVIN STRANG

The Franchising Director has today published "Appraisal of Support
for Passenger Rail Services - Planning Criteria: An Interim Guide",
which sets out the basis on which he intends to appraise the costs
and benefits of new passenger rail investment and changes in
service levels. I have approved these Criteria on an interim basis,
and instructed the Franchising Director to keep them under review,
Revising the Criteria as necessary in the light of the wider review
of economic appraisal being undertaken as part of the Government's
integrated transport strategy.

Copies of the Criteria have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER 1997
14616/97/98
DETR
(47)

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mrs Helen Brinton (Lab, Peterborough)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the
Regions what steps he has taken to improve the regulation of the
rail industry. (14615)

DR GAVIN STRANG

I have today signed a voluntary Concordat with the independent Rail
regulator which provides a framework for better regulation of the
railways. The Concordat includes a statement of the Government's
objectives for the rail industry, the Rail Regulator's aims and
objectives, and a framework for communication between Ministers,
the Franchising Director and the Rail Regulator. Copies of the

Concordat have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER 1997
14615/97/98
DETR
(47)

For Immediate Release. No 314/97 Monday 17 November 1997

PHOTOCALL: SPORTS MINISTER, TONY BANKS MP, AT EDGE END HIGH SCHOOL on Friday 21 November at 7.30pm

Sports Minister, Tony Banks, will be the chief guest at this year's prize giving at Edge End. He will be joined by local MP, Gordon Prentice, and Burnley MP, Peter Pike.

Further Information from the Head teacher: Martin Burgess, Edge End High School, Hibson Road, Nelson.

For Immediate Release. No 315/97 Friday 14 November 1997

ROLLS ROYCE GETS £200m FROM GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP IMPROVED TRENT JET ENGINE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, expressed delight today with the news that the leading aerospace company Rolls Royce was to get £200m from the Government to help fund the future development of the Trent engine.

Press reports say the deal will deliver the cash over a four year period.

Industry Minister, John Battle, who visited Pendle last month, told The Times newspaper today: "This is not state aid. It is a commercially assessed deal. We could get returns over 40 years."

The Pendle MP, whose constituency is home to the RR plant at Barnoldswick, said the news would go down well in the area. "Aerospace is crucially important to the North West and the new Government has shown its confidence in the industry with this decision."

For Immediate Release. No 316/97 Wed 19 November 1997

MP PLEDGES MORE CASH FOR EDUCATION

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, told local students from Nelson and Colne College at the weekend that education remains the key priority for the new Labour Government. He said money is already being earmarked for key areas. However, the MP admitted that the Government couldn't do it alone and students would be expected to make a contribution to the cost of their education.

Speaking from Westminster today, the MP said: "Already, large sums have been or are being channelled into our schools, colleges and universities. On 23 September the Government announced a package of measures to allow an extra £165 million to be spent on higher education in 1998-99. The package included money to help maintain and improve standards, support capital improvements and double student access funds."

On 6 November, schools were invited to bid for a share of £250m to tackle the significant backlog of repairs to schools. The cash boost of £250 million for schools is the second phase of the £1.3 billion New Deal for Schools announced by the Chancellor on Budget day."

"On 12 November, the further education sector which includes colleges such as Nelson and Colne got a boost with £83 million of new funding, together with the chance to bid for well over £100 million worth of New Deal education and training in 1998/99."

Turning specifically to the issue of the student contribution, the MP said: "No student from a family with a gross income of about £23,000 will have to pay any tuition fees. This is about one third of the total number of students. Up to a family income of about

more follows:

MP PLEDGES MORE CASH FOR EDUCATION

£35,000, students will have to make a contribution - the greater the income the greater the contribution. Above £35,000, students will be expected to pay the tuition fee. The £1,000 represents about one quarter of the annual cost of a university education. The Government will pay the other 75%."

The MP continued: "Parents will not be asked to pay any more in total towards the tuition fee and living costs than they are expected to pay now towards living costs alone."

"As I say, this will be achieved by extending the loan available for living costs by up to £1,000, depending on parental income, to cover the tuition fee element. Those on lower incomes - about a third - will be exempt from paying any tuition fee at all."

"A further third will pay a proportion of the fee, with only the remainder paying the full fee. Students will only repay the money when they can afford to do so. In addition, unemployed students on part-time courses will in future be exempt from fees as a new contribution to helping part-timers in higher education."

The MP said: "The students were clearly unpersuaded. However, I made it clear I would take up their concerns with David Blunkett. They were concerned about being loaded with debts and they feared the proposed system would scare off potential students. I don't believe they will but we have a job to do of explaining our thinking."

Notes for editors The Government announced its plans for the future funding of higher education and student support on 23 July 1997, the same day that the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education under Sir Ron Dearing reported.

Two Investing in the future: Supporting students in higher education
leaflets are available setting out the Government's plans for supporting students financially.

For Immediate Release. No 317/97 Monday 17 November 1997

MP TO MEET HEALTH MINISTER IN BID TO LEGALISE CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL USE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be making a fresh bid to persuade Health Ministers to look again at the possibility of legalising cannabis for medical use. On 8 December, he will be joining Grimsby MP, Austin Mitchell, and leading academics in a round table meeting with Health Minister Paul Boetang.

Tomorrow (Tuesday) the British Medical Association is due to publish a report which it is believed will argue for the legalisation of cannabinoids - or cannabis derivatives - which it will say have medical uses.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the Pendle MP said: "I am keeping my fingers crossed that we may be able to make some progress on the back of the BMA report which is likely to be helpful in moving the debate forward."

Note to Editors: The following article written by the Pendle MP appeared in the Independent on Sunday on 5 October 1997:

In July this year the British Medical Association voted overwhelmingly for
CANNABIS products to be made available for medical use, if this happens it
will simply return us to the position which applied before 1973, when the
1971 Misuse of Drugs Act came into force, outlawing medical use of the drug.

Before then doctors could prescribe CANNABIS which was often dispensed in tincture form, like cough mixture.

Later this month the BMA's Board of Science will, it is believed, recommend wider use of the drug. This will reflect opinion within the profession which is moving sharply in favour of legalisation for medical use, The BMA magazine's Doctors Decide Panel of over 100 hospital doctors and GPs wants CANNABIS to be available on prescription. In an article in the BMA News Review earlier this year, 78 per cent of hospital doctors and three in five GPs agreed that the drug should be available for therapeutic purposes.

more follows

MP TO MEET HEALTH MINISTER IN BID TO LEGALISE CANNABIS FOR MEDICAL USE

There is no doubt in my mind that CANNABIS and CANNABIS derivatives can
help people cope with a variety of medical conditions.

The drug has for centuries been regarded as having therapeutic value even if, these days, its efficacy is challenged. There is masses of anecdotal evidence from people suffering from MS, for example, which backs the claim that the drug really works. It can help reduce tremors and spasms and ease

movement. Some people with Aids say it improves their appetite. It can help in the treatment of glaucoma.

Tragically, because its medical use is unlawful it makes research much more difficult than it need be because a special Home Office licence is needed for any drug trial.

Despite this, in 1995, the previous government was forced to lessen the controls on dronabinol, one of the active ingredients c)f CANNABIS, after the World Health Organisation recommended that this derivative had therapeutic value as an anti-emetic for patients undergoing chemotherapy for cancer.

The Misuse of Drugs Act puts CANNABIS in Schedule 1 - drugs subject to the strictest controls on the grounds that they have allegedly little or no medical value and cause social problems through misuse. Besides CANNABIS, the list includes LSD, mescaline, raw opium and coca leaf.

There is a powerful case for taking CANNABIS into the Schedule 2 list of controlled drugs with medical use, such as morphine, methadone and amphetamines, allowing qualified doctors lawfully to prescribe drugs that they believe will benefit patients.

Gordon PRENTICE is MP for Pendle in Lancashire and secretary of the All
Party MS Group.

For Immediate Release. No 318/97 Monday 17 November 1997

HOUSING MINISTER'S VISIT TO PENDLE POSTPONED

The mini housing summit scheduled for this Wednesday has been postponed. The Housing Minister, Hilary Armstrong, must stay in London for a Cabinet sub committee meeting where her presence is required. This was unforeseen.

The meeting was to bring together representatives from Burnley and Hyndburn as well as Pendle.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, who set up the visit, explained: "Everyone is naturally very disappointed but people understand that these things happen. I hope the visit can be re-arranged so that Hilary can be with us soon."

For Immediate Release. No 319/97 Tuesday 18 November 1997

MP IN HIGH LEVEL TALKS ON LOW FLYING

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, will be taking his criticisms of military low flying into the heart of the defence establishment this Thursday. The MP will be stepping into the Ministry of Defence to quiz Defence Minister John Spellar and the top brass about the controversial policy which upsets so many of his Pendle constituents.

Speaking from Westminster in advance of Thursday's war of words, the MP said: "The RAF says it has to train pilots to fly at low level and I do not quarrel with that - so long as it is not over built up areas. Over the years we have seen a number of near misses where fast jets have got into trouble and have come down yards from schools and houses."

The MP added: "The change of Government has brought the wind of change to the MoD. In the last Parliament there is no way this kind of high level summit would have taken place on low flying."

At the next Defence Questions on 1 December, the MP is down to ask the Secretary of State for Defence to review the boundaries of the UK low flying zones for fast jets.

For Immediate Release. No 320/97 Thursday 20 November 1997

MP UNEARTHS SHOCK STATISTICS ON COUNCIL HOUSE DISREPAIR

The council housing stock in East Lancashire needs over £180m to bring it up to scratch according to figures unearthed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP quizzed Housing Minister Nick Raynesford about the extent of the dilapidation of the council housing stock and was shocked by the scale of the problem.

The Minister said councils provide their own estimates of the need for capital work in the annual HIP (Housing Investment Programme) round.

The Pendle MP said: "It will take millions to address all the problems we face in East Lancashire. Clearly, the new Government cannot move mountains overnight but we have

started to tackle things by allowing councils to use, on a phased basis, the capital receipts they have accumulated over the years from the sale of council houses and other assets."

"No-one believes we can wave a magic wand but we all want to see steady progress made. Clearly, some local authorities have more council houses than others and the scale of the problem there is likely to be proportionately greater. We also have a very big and very run down private sector and it too needs help."

Local Authority	Need for Capital Works to the Council Housing Stock on 1 April 96
Pendle	£4,585,000
Ribble Valley	£6,689,000
Rossendale	£46,641,000
Hyndburn	£19,700,000
Burnley	£32,611,000
Blackburn	£81,965,000

Source Housing Investment Form 3

For Immediate Release. No 321/97 Tuesday 25 November 1997

LOCAL MP SAYS "GO GREEN - BUY A CLEAN MACHINE!"

The development of "clean cars" is a top priority for the new Government according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. Speaking from Westminster earlier today, the MP says a key focus of future transport policy must be sustainable travel which allows easy access to safe and affordable transport without damaging the environment.

The Pendle MP was speaking as further details emerged of the Government's Cleaner Vehicles Task Force - a new initiative to drive forward the concept of the "clean machine". Already Ministers have given the go ahead to convert vehicles in the Government car pool to alternative, environmentally friendly, fuels.

Last week, Transport Minister Dr Gavin Strang told a SERA conference in London that the task force - under the co-chairmanship of Dr Strang and Ian McAllister of the SMMT (Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders) - would encourage individuals and fleet buyers to look at the green option when buying new vehicles.

Gordon Prentice said: "I want to see the Government promote research and development that will keep Britain at the cutting edge of cleaner vehicles technology. We want to work with industry to make better, cleaner and more attractive vehicles which people actually want to drive."

The MP added: "The Government understands that road transport is important. But we are absolutely determined to encourage alternative means of transport and for wider use of public

more follows

LOCAL MP SAYS "GO GREEN - BUY A CLEAN MACHINE!"

transport. And we are not shying away from difficult questions on how pricing, fiscal policies and regulation can help change views on public transport and our relationship with the car."

Note to Editors: The consultation on the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) closed on 14 November. The Government received around
five-thousand responses. The consultation included 12 regional and 6 national seminars where interested bodies were invited to put their ideas on the future direction of transport policy to Ministers. The last seminar concentrating on breaking the culture of car dependency - was held in London on last week. The White Paper on the ITS is expected in May.

For Immediate Release. No 322/97 Tuesday 25 November 1997

THIEVES ARE MAKING A MINT SAYS MP

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says counterfeiters are hard at work in the North West, quite literally "coining it". He says that over the past fortnight he has received two fake £1 coins in his change and that the counterfeit problem may be a lot bigger than the authorities care to let on.

Speaking from Westminster after quizzing Treasury Minister Helen Liddell, the MP said: "The fake £1 coins are very realistic but the yellow metal skin of the coin wears off to expose a silvery colour underneath. They also seem to be ever so slightly lighter than the genuine coin. People clearly should be on their guard."

The Minister told the Pendle MP: "Special precautions are always taken to protect higher value coins. This is done by developing and using sophisticated alloys, edge lettering and, in the case of the new bi-coloured £2 coin, the introduction of a latent feature."

Note to Editor: The MP asked the Minister what estimates she had made of the number of counterfeit notes and coins circulating nationally and in the North West. The Minister replied: "The Bank of England is not in a position to provide a reliable estimate of the number of counterfeit notes in circulation. A record is maintained of the number of counterfeit notes which are received from circulation but the Bank of England, in common with most note issuing authorities, does not publish details of the counterfeit notes it receives. However, despite an increase in counterfeiting between 1990 and 1995, counterfeit notes detected still represent only a small fraction of 1 per cent of the total notes in circulation throughout that period. The number of counterfeit notes received during 1996 shows a reduction against earlier totals. Counterfeit notes are found throughout the UK and there is no particular bias towards the North West. The Royal Mint is not in a position to provide a reliable estimate of the number of counterfeit £1 coins in circulation. The number is believed to be very small in relation to the total number in circulation.

For Immediate Release. No 323/97 Tuesday 25 November 1997

MP BACKS TUC "BAD BOSS" HOTLINE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing the TUC's "Bad Bosses" Hotline which is running between 1st and 5th December for exploited employees to report their working conditions. The freephone number is 0800 882 123 and will be available over the five day campaign period.

The MP said "The TUC did this back in 1995 when it targeted the North West and it was a huge success. Dreadful, exploitative employers were flushed from cover. The "Bad Bosses" campaign is now a nationwide initiative."

A TUC leaflet being distributed as part of the campaign reads: We are looking for Britain's Worst Bosses. Tell us your story. Are you bullied or harassed at work? Does your boss expect you to work long hours for poverty pay? Are you in fear of losing your job

because you don't have a proper contract? Is your workplace full of accidents waiting to happen?

Note to Editors: In 1995 the Pendle MP exposed Peter Pomgourou of Christina Fashions of Manchester who employed one of the MP's Pendle constituents at piecework rates - the equivalent of 15p an hour.

For Immediate Release. No 324/97 Monday 24 November 1997

MYRA HINDLEY TO STAY IN JAIL UNTIL SHE DIES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, quizzed Home Secretary, Jack Straw, in the Commons this afternoon about his decision to extend, from 30 years to the end of her natural life, the sentence handed down to Moors Murderer Myra Hindley in 1966. Then aged 23, Hindley was jailed with Ian Brady for murdering Lesley-Ann Downey, 10, and Edward Evans, 17. They later confessed to murdering Keith Bennett, 12, and Pauline Reade, 16.

The Pendle MP asked the Home Secretary if Hindley had any recourse to the European Convention on Human Rights to challenge his decision to extend her sentence to life with no possibility of parole. Straw said she was to challenge his decision in the High Court next month.

Tonight, in the BBC's Panorama programme, a former Appeal Court judge describes the Home Secretary's decision as "unreasonable and unlawful". The Pendle MP commented: "Myra Hindley committed an appalling barbaric crime in murdering these defenceless children over thirty years ago. Clearly, she is paying the price of her unique notoriety. I see people who have been convicted of acts of the utmost depravity yet, astonishingly, walk free from prison presumably because they have served their sentence and are no longer deemed to be a threat to society - and the tabloids have forgotten about them."

Note to Editors: According to the Press Association, Hindley is among a small group of 24 prisoners who will end their days in prison.

For Immediate Release. No 325/97 Tuesday 25 November 1997

FUEL CASH BOOST FOR 16,259 PENDLE PENSIONERS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, today welcomed the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Pre-Budget Report.

Speaking from Westminster the MP said: "Gordon Brown's Pre-Budget Report shows how the Government is building long-term prosperity through measures to help people off welfare into work, improve competition, innovation and investment and ensure economic stability."

"Today's Pre-Budget Report is good news for Pendle. It meets the people's priorities: improving childcare, helping pensioners - building on what the Government has already done in health and education."

"The Chancellor announced new help for all pensioners with winter fuel bills. It means that, this year and next, 16,259 pensioners in Pendle will benefit from the £20 fuel payment for all pensioner households and £50 for pensioner households on income support."

"The Chancellor's announcement of a £300m programme of a for childcare over the next five years is good news for all parents in Pendle. With up to 30,000 childcare clubs and up to one million places across the country as a result of the new programme, there will be a massive expansion of childcare and a childcare club in every community"

For Immediate Release. No 326/97 Wed 26 November 1997

RENAL DIALYSIS CRISIS LOOMS IN EAST LANCS

The demand for renal dialysis in East Lancashire is set to soar over the next decade according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. He wants the new Government to start planning now for the anticipated upsurge in demand.

At Westminster this week he asked Health Minister, Paul Boetang, what estimates he has made of the likely additional future demand. "Breakthroughs are being made all the time in modern medicine. People who are in their sixties and seventies are now receiving dialysis and this would not have been the case a few years ago. And people of Asian origin are, unfortunately, more likely to develop kidney problems than the rest of the

population. All these factors have big implications for the health service."

Health Minister, Paul Boetang, told the MP: "The East Lancashire Health Authority, in conjunction with the three other health authorities in Lancashire and South Cumbria, has commissioned a statistical modelling exercise to predict the numbers of residents likely to require renal dialysis up to the year 2005. The modelling exercise is complex and is able to take into account special factors such as the age structure of the population and the proportion of residents from an ethnic minority background."

"The model predicts a very substantial increase in the total number of residents requiring dialysis, from 120 in 1996 to 220 in 2005. In order to meet the predicted demand for dialysis places over the next 10 years, East Lancashire Health Authority is about to consider the best way of increasing local provision."

For Immediate Release. No 327/97 Thursday 27 November 1997

NEW BOOST TO SECURE UK AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION

Three new pre-competitive and collaborative research projects between Government and industry designed to maintain Britain's technological competitiveness in civil aircraft manufacture have been launched by the Government. The news has been welcomed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who is a leading campaigner for aerospace.

The three projects, worth more than £6 million, involve applied research on advanced materials and structures. In civil aircraft, advanced materials and structures offer potential weight saving, greater strength and lower manufacturing and maintenance costs. The projects have been launched with financial support from the DTI's Civil Aircraft Research and Technology Demonstration (CARAD) Programme.

Speaking from Westminster, the Pendle MP said: "These projects demonstrate the value of Government and industry working in partnership in promoting Britain's technological competitiveness. These projects will help to maintain Britain's competitive edge in civil aircraft technology."

Notes for Editors: 1. The DTI's Civil Aircraft Research and Demonstration (CARAD) Programme supports pre competitive research and technology
demonstration across the full range of civil aircraft technologies. It seeks to encourage collaborative basic and applied research effort.
CARAD's prime objective is to help ensure the long term availability
of essential aircraft technologies for exploitation by the UK aerospace industry, through an integrated national programme of
research.

For Immediate Release. No328/97 Wednesday 26 November 1997

VAT CUT ON ENERGY SAVING WILL BRING BETTER INSULATION TO 40,000 HOMES A YEAR says MP

Some 40,000 extra households each year will keep warmer as a result of the Government's decision to cut to from 17.5% to 5% the VAT on the installation of energy saving materials for the less well-off under certain Government-funded schemes, to be enacted in the next Budget.

The measures, set out in the Chancellor's Pre-Budget report, mean that the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) and similar Government schemes should benefit by an extra £7.5 million.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, said: "The new Government wants everyone to be able to keep warm."

Notes for Editors: VAT on domestic fuel and power was reduced from 8% to 5% in the Summer Budget, with effect from 1 September 1997. VAT on energy saving materials and their installation is currently 17.5%.

For Immediate Release. No 329/97 Thursday 28 November 1997

MP RIDICULES TORY POSITION ON SINGLE CURRENCY

The Conservatives are incapable of making up their minds on the Single Currency according to Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

He told the Commons this afternoon that the Opposition's policy of "immobilism" left them with an "eccentric" policy of not joining for 10 years even if the currency were a huge success and it was in Britain's interests to join.

The MP told Chancellor Gordon Brown at Treasury Questions today that the Conservatives were totally confused.

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "The Conservatives cannot say they are against the single currency in principle and say they want to "save the pound" when they rule out joining only for a decade and not for all time."

"In contrast, the Government's position is crystal clear. If it is manifestly in the nation's interest to join we will say so. There will be a triple lock - a decision in Cabinet, a vote in Parliament and a referendum leaving the final decision to the people."

"Whether we are in or out of the single currency it will have a profound effect on us here in the UK."

"But we won't go in at any price. It has got to be good for Britain."

For Immediate Release. No 330/97 Friday 28 November 1997

MP WANTS NEW BLOOD ON THE FARM

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, is pressing the Government to do more to get young people into farming. Figures unearthed by the MP show that the average of hill farmers in 1995 was 57.

The MP, whose constituency is home to many hill farmers, said: "Our hill farmers are getting older and older. The average age is now 57. In 1985 it was 56 and in 1975 it was 54. Every ten years the average age ratchets up another year."

The MP continued: "Hill farmers have a hard life and the average income is about £14,000. It is no bed of roses."

For Immediate Release. No 331/97 Friday 28 November 1997

MP HAILS FOX HUNTING VOTE AS A TRIUMPH

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, this afternoon hailed the Commons vote on Michael Foster's Hunting with Dogs Bill as a "great triumph." The Commons voted to give the Bill a second reading by 411 votes to 151.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "This overwhelming vote showed the strength of feeling in the House and in the country for a long overdue measure."

"Blood sports are cruel and should be banned."

No 332/97 EMBARGO: Tuesday 2 December 1997

LOTTERY CASH FOR MARSDEN PARK SPRUCE-UP

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £12,750 to Pendle Borough Council for its Marsden Park restoration project.

The park is the largest in Nelson with, says the Lottery Fund, has "a variety of historical and horticultural features including several distinctive carved stone features which were part of the original Marsden Hall site".

The restoration plan will look at ways of restoring the park within the Borough's developing parks strategy.

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, commented: "This modest but welcome award is excellent news. Our parks need regular "care and attention" if we are to encourage people to use them. They are a marvellous resource."

Note to Editors: The Heritage Lottery Fund has a Urban Parks Programme. This is the third round which supports 45 parks across the UK.

For Immediate Release. No 333/97 Monday 1 December 1997

PHOTOCALL: GORDON PRENTICE MP will be at Coates Lane County Primary, Kirkstall Drive, Barnoldswick at 6.30pm on Friday 5 December

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, will open the Charter Mark Christmas Fair at the school and re-present the Charter Mark to the head teacher, Sue Holloway.

Coates Lane is the only Primary School in Lancashire ever to win a Charter Mark.

For Immediate Release. No 334/97 Tuesday 2 December 1997

PRENTICE AND REDWOOD CLASH OVER ROLLS ROYCE DEAL

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, clashed angrily with Shadow DTI Minister John Redwood last night to defend the Government's decision last month to help Rolls Royce fund the future development of the Trent aero engine.

In an Opposition day debate on the Government's policies for business, the Conservative Industry spokesman, John Redwood invited the House of Commons to speculate about the role of the President of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett, in getting cash to the company - whose HQ is based in her Derby constituency.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is outraged at Redwood's inference that RR had received special favours. Speaking after the exchange the Pendle MP said: "Redwood has rolled from the gutter into the sewer. The decision was to award £200m in launch aid - money which has to be repaid - and not £100m as Redwood claimed. And the decision was specifically not taken by the President of the Board of Trade because of her constituency interest but by another DTI Minister, John Battle."

Industry Minister, John Battle, who visited Pendle in October, told The Times newspaper on 14 November when the deal was announced: "This is not state aid. It is a commercially assessed deal. We could get returns over 40 years."

The Pendle MP - whose constituency is home to the RR plant at Barnoldswick which manufactures fan blades for aero engines - added: "John Redwood is bad news for aerospace. He is more interested in smears than the truth and he gets his facts wrong."

For Immediate Release. No 335/97 Tuesday 2 December 1997

LABOUR'S NEW MONEY FOR THE HEALTH SERVICE IN EAST LANCASHIRE

An analysis of the Labour Government's new money, this year and next, for the Health Service in Pendle, published today by local MP, Gordon Prentice, reveals the extent to which the East Lancashire Health Authority has benefited in hard cash from the new Labour Government.

The MP's analysis reveals that, next year, the East Lancashire Health Authority will get an extra £12,258,000 from the Government. This is East Lancashire's share of the £1.2 billion extra which the Government is giving to the NHS overall next year. If Labour had stuck to the amount of money the Tories were planning to give to the NHS, East Lancashire would have got only £5,352,000. The Government has doubled the amount of extra money available next year to the local NHS in East Lancashire

The analysis also shows that the East Lancashire Health Authority has already received £660,000 extra this winter to cope with additional pressures and help restrain the rise in waiting lists. This is East Lancashire's share of the £300 million extra which the
Government is giving to the NHS this year. The ELHA has received an extra £85,000 this year out of NHS red tape and is now being spent on improved breast cancer treatment for local women

The MP added: "We will shortly be publishing our plans for the NHS in a new White Paper. We want to have an NHS that is modern and dependable. A service that people know they can rely on. That's what local people want. That's what I want."

For Immediate Release. No 336/97 Tuesday 2 December 1997

COUNCIL SETTLEMENT "TIGHT BUT FAIR"

This year's local government finance settlement is making a start on getting the system right after years of unfairness under the previous Government says local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from Westminster earlier today as the Government's plans for councils were announced, the MP said: "It makes a start

on delivering Labour's pledges on education. It also starts to make local finance fairer. We have retained capping but, before too long, that will go."

"£835m of new money is going to our schools - our top priority. Lancashire County Council - the education authority - is allowed a 4.9% increase over the current year's budget and that is good news."

"In Pendle, the Government has increased the Revenue Support Grant by a whopping 19.2% - up to £3,825,000. Pendle's Standard Spending Assessment is up 9% to £8,565,000. The council nevertheless will be required to hold its own spending to the current year's level. In the coming year, all our efforts must go into our top priority - education."

"The Council Tax payer in Pendle will benefit."

For Immediate Release. No 337/97 Tuesday 2 December 1997

LANCS POLICE AND FIRE SPENDING SET TO RISE NEXT YEAR

The Lancashire Police Authority will be able to increase its spending in 1998/9 by 3.8% or £6.4m says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. This is good news for the war against crime he says.

The MP was speaking at Westminster as the Deputy Prime Minister was outlining the local government finance settlement for the coming year. Nationally, there will be a 4.8% increase for fire authorities. The MP says this recognises and responds to the fire service's revenue needs, notably for pensions, training and fire safety.

The MP added: "The emergency services are vitally important. It is absolutely right that they should be properly funded."

For Immediate Release. No 338/97 Thursday 3 December 1997

NEW LOTTERY PLANS TO BENEFIT PENDLE

The Government's plans to reform the National Lottery will benefit Pendle enormously says local MP Gordon Prentice. The MP was speaking at Westminster today as the Government's new National Lottery Bill was published in Parliament.

The MP said: "Labour promised before the election that it would reform the lottery to reflect people's priorities. The Labour Government has now delivered on that promise."

"This Bill will soon enable people in Pendle to apply for lottery grants for after-school clubs, to help children get more out of school and help parents juggle demands of home and work; resources to help train teachers and librarians in information and communications technology; and for healthy living centres to help people, young and old, keep fit and well. Our talented youngsters will also be able to get money to develop their creative ideas and talents with the new National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts." (NESTA)

The MP added: "I am delighted that the Government has made sure there will be a fast track application procedure for small community applicants. It will benefit pensioner groups, scout troops, women's institutes and many others in Pendle."

The MP said the Government plans to establish a New Opportunities Fund to oversee the grants to education and health projects as well as to NESTA. Over £1bn will be available over the next three years for these new good causes.

For Immediate Release. No 339/97 Thursday 4 December 1997

SCHOOL STANDARDS BOOST

The Government will today unveil the biggest ever drive to raise standards in Britain's schools, with the publication of Labour's School Standards Bill.

Today's Bill builds on Labour's White Paper *Excellence in Schools,* which set out the Government's approach to education based on six principles:

- • Education will be at the heart of Government
- • Policies will benefit the many, not just the few

- • The focus will be on standards in schools, not just the structure of the school system.
  • We will intervene in under performing schools and celebrate the successful
- • There will be zero tolerance of under-performance
- • Government will work in partnership with all those committed to raising standards.

The School Standards Bill will provide the powers for the Government to step in and take action against failing teachers, failing schools, or failing education authorities.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, who consulted local schools over the summer on the Government's proposals, commented: "Education was the Tories' biggest failure. We are delivering on our promise to make education our number one priority."

For Immediate Release. No 340/97 Thursday 4 December 1997

PRENTICE WELCOMES NEW DEAL FOR THE ENGLISH REGIONS

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed moves to establish Regional Development Agencies in the English regions. He says this will allow regions such as the North West to "punch their weight to prosperity".

Details of the regional plans were announced yesterday by Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

Launching the Regions White Paper - Building Partnerships for Prosperity' - in the Commons, John Prescott said: "The English Regions want control over their own economic destiny. They want the powers and opportunities to contribute to the prosperity of their own communities - to create jobs and to create wealth."

"Regional Development Agencies will address this. They will be powerful and influential bodies with substantial budgets, able to make a real mark on the economies of their region. They will be lead bodies in co-ordinating inward investment, raising peoples' skills, improving business competition and social and physical regeneration. For the first time we will have a properly co-ordinated approach to economic development in the English Regions."

The Pendle MP added: "Far too much power is centralised in Whitehall. This is a long overdue step to give the English Regions a much greater say over what happens in their own area."

Note to Editors: A summary of the White Paper - Building partnerships for prosperity - follows below:

The Government plans to create nine new Development Agencies in the
English Regions, business-led but including all regional interests,

more follows

NEW DEAL FOR THE ENGLISH REGIONS

to integrate more fully the work of national, regional and local partners in economic development in its widest sense. RDAs would have
five core areas of responsibility:

economic development and regeneration;
competitiveness, business support and investment;
skills;
employment; and
sustainable development.

The Government is also encouraging the development of voluntary
Regional Chambers, bringing together local authorities and other regional partners.

Regional Development Agencies

Each RDA would have these core functions:

leadership in developing and implementing regional Economic Strategies, building upon existing regional competitiveness partnerships, bringing greater coherence to the work of regional partners, and developing a fuller understanding of regional economies;

social, physical and economic regeneration, to maximise and spread the benefits of economic development and investment, including
administration of the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund, and

taking a leading role on European Union structural funds. RDAs will
take on the regional regeneration functions of English Partnerships
and the Rural Development Commission. The national EP capability,
and its role in projects such as the Millennium Experience and the
Coalfields Initiative, will be retained for the present.

- the economic development and regeneration of rural areas, addressing remoteness, integrating town and country, and with specific structures to reflect rural needs;

  improvements to the skills base of the region, including developing a regional skills agenda and assessing the contribution of
TECs towards regional objectives and promoting training for major
investments;

  regional co-ordination of inward investment and other major investment/reinvestment projects of regional/national significance;
providing advice on Regional Selective Assistance to Ministers;

  marketing of the region as a business location, in conjunction with the Invest in Britain Bureau and regional partners; and

- business support, where the RDAs will monitor and provide a regional focus for the work of Business Links, and

more follows

- facilitating investments, with RDAs investing in projects as part of Public-Private Partnerships; promoting technology transfer,

including maximising the benefits of the work of higher education
institutions.

RDAs will also contribute to policies and programmes on:

- Transport and other aspects of land-use planning
- The environment and sustainable development
- Further and Higher Education
- Crime prevention, Housing and Public health
- Tourism, culture and sports infrastructure projects

Next Steps

Subject to Parliamentary approval, RDAs will take up their powers on 1 April 1999, having been established some months before to ensure a smooth transition. RDAs will have the same boundaries as the current Government Offices for the Regions, with the exception that a single RDA will serve the whole North-West, including Merseyside.

Boards will be business-led, but board members will reflect regional interests, such as the voluntary sector, rural areas, and tourism, and will include four local authority members. The RDA staff will be drawn largely from English Partnerships, the Rural Development Commission, and the Government Offices for the Regions, all of which are also contributing functions to the new RDAs. Government Offices will continue with their other current activities such as in relation to land-use planning and housing.

Details of budgets, location of offices within regions, and other transitional arrangements will be made in further announcements next year. In most cases practical arrangements will not be dictated from the centre but will be for RDAs themselves to determine, in consultation with their regional partners.

Regional Chambers

Local authorities and regional partners are already coming together to form regional fora: the Government encourages this, and RDA will

be under a duty to consult voluntary Regional Chambers, where these
match broad criteria to ensure they are properly representative of
the region. The creation of Regional Chambers - and RDAs - reflects
the Government's commitment to greater decision-making and accountability in the English regions.

For Immediate Release. No 341/97 Thursday 4 December 1997

CAR TAX DODGERS CRUSHED

News that more than 100 untaxed vehicles have been crushed in London has been hailed by Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice. The MP is an enthusiastic "clamper and crusher" of vehicles that are untaxed.

In an announcement today the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency confirmed that 100 cars had been crushed and 600 had been wheel clamped in the drive to cut car tax dodging. Since the campaign started over £1m has been paid out by motorists for cars which had previously been untaxed.

The Pendle MP who is Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Transport Minister, Gavin Strang, said: "Last month (on 3 November) the scheme was extended to the North West of England and we have high hopes that it will prove to be a big success."

The scheme will cover the whole country by autumn 1998.

Note to Editors: Last month the MP said the policy should be clamp and then crush. "Handing back an untaxed vehicle crushed to the size of a tea chest would undoubtedly ensure prompt payment next time."

For Immediate Release. No 342/97 Thursday 4 December 1997

MP PRESSES FOR EARLY ACTION ON EX-TORY CABINET MINISTER JONATHAN AITKEN

A report from the Metropolitan Police on the alleged perjury of former Tory Cabinet Minister, Jonathan Aitken, is long overdue says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was quizzing Attorney General, John Morris, in the Commons today when he asked how it was possible for a team of Guardian journalists to research, write and publish ***The Liar*** a book on the collapsed libel action while nothing has yet emerged from Scotland Yard - 6 months after the case abruptly ended.

Speaking afterwards, the MP said: "Aitken resigned from the Conservative Cabinet to fight allegations of sleaze with *"the simple sword of truth and the trusty shield of British fair play"*. It is clear from the Guardian book that he perjured himself and sought to persuade his wife and daughter to lie. Had he been successful he would no doubt have won exemplary damages having resigned his Cabinet place to bring the action for libel."

The MP added: "There must not be one law for the rich and well connected and another for the rest of us. Perjury carries a maximum prison sentence of 7 years. A person could be charged with the serious common law offence of perverting or attempting to pervert the course of justice. As a common law offence, the maximum penalty for perverting the course of justice is for the courts which means they are free to impose whatever penalty they consider appropriate."

For Immediate Release. No 343/97 Monday 8 December 1997

THERE'S TROUBLE AT THE RUMOUR MILL quips MP

Rumours that local MP, Gordon Prentice, has intervened with Ministers in an attempt to influence the decision on the sale of council land at Crown Way are completely unfounded says the MP.

Earlier this year, proposals from McDonalds for a drive thru restaurant provoked controversy when the local council decided to forego the £200,000 it would get from the sale to the burger giant and sell instead to a vet for £90,000. McDonalds has appealed against the council's decision and the issue has been referred to a planning inspector who will consider the matter

next year. The inspector acts in the name of the Secretary of State.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "Every time I pick up the local paper these days there are reports suggesting I am nobbling Ministers to turn down the sale to the vets. Let me make it absolutely clear. I have neither written nor spoken to any Minister in the Department about the Crown Way issue and I do not intend to. The matter properly lies with the Inspector."

"A number of constituents have been in touch with me over recent weeks to express their concerns and I have told them in writing my views. I think the drive thru proposal would cause big problems given the increase in traffic expected in the area and the difficulties in the traffic movements identified by council officers in their report."

"If there are concerns about the money foregone to the Council then advice can be sought from the District Auditor."

For Immediate Release. No 344/97 Tuesday 9 December 1997

MP WELCOMES LANDMARK JUDGEMENTS ON LANDLORD AND FITTER IN GAS POISONING CASE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed the landmark judgement on a Stoke on Trent landlord and a gas fitter from Newcastle under Lyme who have both been given prison sentences, at Stafford Crown Court, of two years and fifteen months, respectively, for manslaughter. Both men pleaded guilty.

This is the first time that custodial sentences have been imposed in connection with failures to ensure safety in the maintenance of gas appliances, whether in rented accommodation
or any other; and only the second time that manslaughter charges
arising from health and safety failures have led directly to prison sentences.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "This judgement is a breath of fresh air in gas poisoning cases. For too long, landlords have, quite literally, been able to get away with murder."

Notes to Editors: In recent years, around 30 fatal accidents a year from carbon monoxide poisoning from gas appliances have been reported to the
HSE. In the latest year, 1996-97, provisional figures, released in July, showed that only 21 such deaths had been reported. This figure has still to be confirmed, however.

Carbon monoxide poisonings can be caused by gas appliances which have not been properly installed or maintained. When gas does not burn properly excess carbon monoxide is produced, which is toxic. It is particularly dangerous as you cannot see it, taste it, or even smell it. The early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include tiredness, drowsiness, headache, pains, in the chest and stomach pains. You are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if •your appliance was poorly installed; •your appliance is not working properly; •your appliance has not been checked or maintained properly; •there is not enough fresh air in the room; •your chimney or flue gets blocked up; or •you allow unqualified people to install or maintain your appliance.

For Immediate Release. No 345/97 Tuesday 9 December 1997

MP BACKS NEW BLUEPRINT FOR THE NHS

The abolition of the wasteful and bureaucratic competitive internal market is promised in the Government's new blueprint for the NHS. The White Paper, *The New NHS,* has been welcomed by local MP Gordon Prentice who says it will give the NHS a new lease of life.

Health Secretary, Frank Dobson, told the Commons this afternoon "We will abolish the internal market because it has failed. It has failed to deliver quality of care, fairness for patients or efficient services. It has set doctor against doctor. Hospital against hospital. Its business culture has been at odds with the ethos of the NHS and those who work within it. Patients want an NHS where staff can work together to provide better services rather than having to compete against each other."

The Pendle MP added: "Fundholding will go to be replaced by primary care groups in each area where doctors and nurses

decide what happened. The culture of secrecy will go to be replaced by a new openness and transparency. And we are going all out to ensure that the new primary care groups and council social services work closely together providing seamless, integrated care."

"This White Paper is a real shot in the arm for the NHS."

For Immediate Release. No 346/97 Tuesday 9 December 1997

MP CALLS FOR JOB SPECS FOR QCs

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, says the system of appointing QCs needs a radical overhaul. At it stands, the head of the judiciary, the Lord Chancellor, takes soundings from judges to see who should become QCs or "take silk" as it is quaintly known.

The MP was speaking following an exchange with Geoffrey Hoon - the Minister who speaks for the Lord Chancellor in the House of Commons.

The MP told the Minister: "Isn't it true that the Bench is a self perpetuating oligarchy of public school and Oxbridghe educated white men and that over the past few years the number of applicants for silk from ethnic minorities has actually decreased. It is not good enough for applications for silk to be decided secretly, in private, with a nod and a wink from the Lord Chancellor; we need more transparency."

The Minister replied saying the Lord Chancellor had extended the number of people he consulted about who was suitable to become a QC.

Speaking afterwards the Pendle MP said: "The bar is the last of the old style closed shops. We must open it up once and for all. Having a job specification listing the qualities and attributes necessary for a QC would be a start."

For Immediate Release. No 347/97 Thursday 11 December 1997

LONE PARENTS CUTS 'MISCONCEIVED'

Speaking at Westminster the day after the Labour backbench revolt over the cuts in lone parent Child Benefit, Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice says the whole episode has been immensely damaging to the Government.

The MP said: "Everyone on the Labour side feels very depressed about the whole thing. It has been very badly mishandled by the Government. What we are proposing in cutting benefits for lone parents is quite wrong. But our main welfare to work policies are absolutely right. The tragedy is that the cart has been put before the horse."

"I want to see people get into well paid work and that is why I am so much in favour of the minimum wage. However, there is a mismatch about when all these policies kick in. The cut in lone parent child benefit which will hit lone parents in low paid work comes in June next year - at least seven months before the national minimum wage comes into force."

"As I told the Commons last night, this issue was allowed to become an insane loyalty test where voting for the Government was demanded irrespective of the obvious failings in the policy."

"I feel very bad about what happened."

Note to Editors: The Pendle MP resigned as PPS to Cabinet Minister Dr Gavin Strang yesterday lunchtime - before the debate on the Social Security Bill began.

For Immediate Release. No 348/97 Tuesday 16 December 1997

MP PREDICTS END OF 'SKY HIGH' AIR FARES

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, has welcomed moves by the Independent Television Commission to clamp down on misleading flight details.

The move will ensure that all flight prices advertised through Teletext and TV adverts on Independent Television channels will include the cost of taxes. This follows a decision by the Advertising Standards Authority last month that flight prices in printed advertising should quote air taxes.

Speaking from Westminster, the MP said: "This announcement is good news for the consumer. Many people have been misled by enticing adverts for cheap flights which don't paint the full picture of what the whole journey costs."

"This move will mean that offers such as a flight to New York being advertised at £169 - when the true cost including UK and US taxes is £215 - will no longer be allowed."

The MP added: "The DTI - through Consumer Minister Nigel Griffiths MP - has already made clear that they will clamp down on pricing malpractice, a move I wholeheartedly support. Consumers demand, and are entitled to know, that the price advertised is the price they will pay."

"I applaud the ITC and the ASA in their move to promote honesty and transparency."

For Immediate Release. No 349/97 Monday 29 December 1997

MP SEEKS ELECTION TO NATIONAL POLICY FORUM

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is to seek election next month to Labour's National Policy Forum. Nine places are reserved on the body for representatives of the Parliamentary Labour Party. All Labour Members of Parliament have a vote.

Speaking from his constituency office in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: "New Labour needs to stay on message with its supporters and the country at large. That means listening to what people are saying and responding to their concerns. We have to spell out precisely what is meant by the fabled hard choices."

The MP added: "What is needed is a new "policy template". A simple set of questions that we can apply to all proposals regardless of their inherent complexity. What is the policy objective? Who are the winners and the losers? When do the losers, if ever, become the winners? Is the policy fair - between individuals, social groups, races, generations and regions?"

"Simple questions such as these should in future keep us off the policy quicksands. We all need to know where we are going and why."

Note to Editors: Nominations close on 19 January. The ballot is on 20th and the result is announced on 21 January.

For Immediate Release. No 350/97 Tuesday 16 December 1997

MP WELCOMES PROMISE OF NEW LEGISLATION TO REGULATE DENTISTRY

The Government is to crack down on dentists who carry out unnecessary treatment says Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice.

The MP was speaking at Westminster following the transmission in Wales of a BBC TV probe into serious malpractice by a Glamorgan based NHS dentist, Duncan John McDonald.

The Pendle MP, who has a long standing interest in dentistry, featured at length in the programme to call for tighter regulation. McDonald was subsequently found guilty of serious professional misconduct and has now been struck off.

The MP commented: "The BBC programme was absolutely chilling and the charge sheet put before the Professional Conduct Committee of the General Dental Council made teeth clenching reading. McDonald put in fraudulent claims to the Dental Practice Board; he did not use proper skill and attention in filling teeth; he didn't keep proper records. It was a dreadful catalogue of incompetence."

Last week, Health Minister Alan Milburn told the MP: "The General Dental Council has made proposals for changes in the Dentists Act 1994 which would give it more appropriate powers for professional regulation and protection of the public. We intend to address these issues when a suitable legislative opportunity arises."

For Immediate Release. No 351/97 Wed17 December1997

JOBLESS FIGURES DOWN AGAIN

The number of people in Pendle who are claiming benefit and seeking work has fallen again this month. There were 1195 (3.2%) unemployed people in November compared to 1267

(3.4%) in October. 921 men are unemployed (4.2%) and 274 women (1.8%).

At Nelson Jobcentre there are 487 unfilled vacancies and 229 in Colne.

Speaking from the House of Commons, the MP said "I am pleased to see that the unemployment figures are down again and that more people have found work."

For Immediate Release. No 352/97 Wednesday 17 December 1997

LABOUR'S RECORD IN OFFICE

MAY
First Education Bill launched to make key progress on Labour's election pledge to reduce class sizes for every 5, 6 & 7 year olds by phasing out the Assisted Places Scheme to free up funding to reduce class sizes for almost half a million infant school pupils.

Government moved fast to fulfil manifesto commitment to a free vote on total ban on hand guns with publication of Firearms (Amendment) Act.

First £100 million reduction in NHS bureaucracy announced with £10 million allocated to boosting access to breast cancer services.

JUNE
Tony Blair's first major European summit as Prime Minister. The Amsterdam summit put Britain at the heart of Europe and started to focus the EU's energy on people's concerns.

Government publishes details of Capital Receipts Initiative outlining the best use of local authority receipts to meet local housing needs. The Budget subsequently announces the first steps in releasing £900m for local councils to invest in building and renovating homes.

Government Summer Literacy Schools initiative announced. Schools nation-wide to provide new opportunities for children to improve basic educational skills.

JULY
Labour's first Budget allocated a total of £2.3 billion extra for schools - an extra £1 billion current spending in 1998-99 and an

additional £1.3 billion for buildings and equipment over the next five years.

more follows

LABOUR'S RECORD IN OFFICE

Labour's first Budget raises £5.2 billion from the windfall tax to pay for welfare to work.

£1.3 billion PFI hospital building programme is given the green light to go ahead - this will result in the biggest new hospital building programme in the history of the NHS.

The Government's first White Paper announced new measures to raise standards and ensure a sound beginning for every child including nursery education for all four year-olds and class sizes of 30 or under for all 5, 6 & 7 year olds.

AUGUST
Deputy Prime Minister sets out vision for transport revolution as he launches new Government Transport White Paper on an integrated, more sustainable, transport system for Britain.

The new Joint Food Safety and Standards Group set up as part of the Government's promise to create the Food Standards Agency.

SEPTEMBER
Jack Straw unveiled new plans for safer communities. new orders will impose strict conditions on anti-social behaviour.

The people of Scotland and Wales vote in referendums on government proposals for a devolved Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly

OCTOBER
£300 million cash boost for the NHS for 1997, on top of the extra £1.2 billion for 1998-99 announced in the budget.

David Blunkett announces £50 million for National Year of Reading - includes money to train 190,000 primary school teachers.

NOVEMBER
Pre-Budget Report launched - includes a new National Childcare Programme is, providing £300 million over the next five years for childcare provision.

Extra help for pensioners with winter fuel bills - additional £20 for all pensioner households, and £50 for pensioner households on Income Support. *more follows*

LABOUR'S RECORD IN OFFICE

To deliver on Labour's pledge to halve the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders, the White Paper *No more excuses* outlines the most radical reform of the youth justice system in a generation.

National Minimum Wage Bill published

DECEMBER
The Schools Standards Bill announced new measures to raise standards and ensure a sound beginning for every child

Prime Minister Tony Blair launched the Social Exclusion Unit, with the remit of co-ordinating the Government's assault on poverty and social exclusion.

New Individual Savings Account (ISA) will make it easier for people to save - free of tax whatever their income is.

White Paper - *The New NHS* - is launched, to modernise the NHS. Provides an extra £1 billion from bureaucracy to be invested in front-line patient care. Also establishes new 24 hour nurse-led help line, and gives guarantees that the wait to see a cancer specialist will be no more than 2 weeks.

Today, Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health, has published details of almost 1,500 initiatives being taken by Health Authorities all over England to help cope with the added demands that winter places on the NHS. All are funded from the extra £300 million given to the NHS this year.

For Immediate Release. No 355/97 Wednesday 17 December 1997

PRENTICE BACKS PIKE IN BID TO SAVE BURNLEY VALUATION OFFICE FROM CLOSURE

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, is backing Peter Pike's bid to keep open the Valuation Office in Burnley. The office is due to close in

1999 with the 30+ staff being transferred to Preston. The Government claims the move will produce a better service.

The Pendle MP's next door neighbour has waged a long campaign to save the Burnley office - culminating in an adjournment debate this afternoon - but his pleas failed to shift Treasury Minister, Dawn Primarolo. She said she had reviewed the closure programme since taking office and while some offices had been spared Burnley, unfortunately, was not one of them.

Speaking after the debate, Gordon Prentice said: "Peter has battled valiantly on behalf of the Burnley Valuation Office. No-one could have done more. He made the point that the whole of East Lancashire - six local authorities covering a population of 500,000 people - will have to look westwards to Preston for a service they previously had on their own doorstep."

"The Government maintains the service can be rationalised and made more effective and save money all at the same time. We hope so."

For Immediate Release. No 354/97 Wednesday 17 December 1997

MP HAILS MINIMUM WAGE BILL

The National Minimum Wage Bill was debated and received its second reading in the Commons yesterday, Tuesday 16 December. Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, writes:

All successful businesses, large and small, have one thing in common - they recognise that the most important asset they have is the people that work for them.

They know that in order to be competitive they must have staff that are motivated and committed to the success of their company. They achieve this by providing their workers with a high level of skills and rewarding them with appropriate levels of pay.

These firms are winners because of the quality of their products, their flexibility and responsiveness to their customers needs.

Unfortunately some employers think that the only way to compete is in terms of cutting costs. They pay their workers low wages and expect them to work long hours in order to earn

enough money to live on. The result is a demotivated workforce, absenteeism, a high turnover of staff and staff shortages. Their products can be shoddy and their service poor.

A national minimum wage will help bring this unacceptable practice to an end.

A minimum wage will be a base level under which employers will not be able to pay their staff. Low pay will no longer be an option and companies will have to pay their workers a fair wage.

more follows

MINIMUM WAGE

But its clear that a national minimum wage isn't simply about ending low pay. Many people recognise that it will improve business efficiency and economic prosperity. That's because a national minimum wage will •encourage companies to invest in their staff in terms of training and have a highly skilled workforce producing high quality goods, •motivate workers, reduce absenteeism and increase output; and •provide a way out of the poverty trap that keeps some people unemployed because they cannot earn enough to match state benefits.

Of course it is important that the national minimum wage is introduced at a sensible level and takes into account the current economic conditions. We have appointed representatives from across industry to the Low Pay Commission under the chairmanship of Professor George Bain.

The Commission will consult with industry to hear their views on how a national minimum wage should be introduced and at what level it should be set. It will then make its recommendations to the Government for consideration.

Apart from the UK, every modem industrial country has some form of mechanism to set minimum wages. They recognise that in today's society is it simply unacceptable to compete simply in terms of cutting costs through low wages.

A national minimum wage will provide people with a way out of the poverty trap and into work. It will help motivate people and give them pride in their work. And it will raise standards and increase competitiveness.

This is why this Government is committed to introducing a national minimum wage.

Note to Editors: Pay Rates in the NORTH WEST (outside Merseyside and Greater Manchester)

1 in 24 employees earns less than £2.49 per hour
1 in 13 employees earns less than £2.99 per hour
1 in 6 employees earns less than £3.49 per hour
1 in 4 employees earns less than £3.99 per hour

Source: regional low pay statistics (from Labour Force Survey, Spring 1997)

For Immediate Release. No 355/97 Thursday 18 December 1997

MP MAKES BID FOR GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR NEW LONGHAUL AIRBUS

Local MP, Gordon Prentice, has made a fresh pitch for Government support for the new Airbus A340 500/600.

In the Commons this afternoon he warmly congratulated Industry Minister, John Battle, on the Government's decision last month to invest £200m on the development of the new Rolls Royce Trent 500 which will power the Airbus.

The MP told the Minister that if British Aerospace got Government backing for the project, the UK content of the aeroplane would hit 50%. The Minister said the issue was under active consideration.

Speaking afterwards the MP said: "British Aerospace is understandably anxious to get the green light. The earlier versions of Airbus have been hugely successful and if we get the go ahead it will have an enormous beneficial impact throughout the region."

Note to Editors: The Managing Director of British Aerospace, M. P. Rouse, wrote to the Pendle MP earlier this month as follows: ....We believe that our revised proposal offers nothing but upside benefits to Government. Any Launch Aid investment by Government will be made from funds generated by the success of the existing A330/A340 programme and the company will be involved in a true partnership with Government in the spirit of

PPP (Public Private Partnership) with considerable benefits to the taxpayer. Taken with the Government's decision to invest £200M in Rolls Royce's Trent engine, this would mean that around 50% of the A340-500/600 would be UK content. Very importantly, a significant number of new jobs will be created in the United Kingdom, from which your constituents would benefit. In addition, a positive response would send a strong signal to Europe of UK Government commitment to the project...

For Immediate Release. No 356/97 Monday 29 December 1997

MP QUERIES COST TO PUBLIC FUNDS OF EX-TORY CABINET MINISTER'S LIBEL ACTION

News that the libel case brought by the disgraced former Conservative Cabinet Minister Jonathan Aitken cost the taxpayer £12,623 has stunned Pendle Labour MP, Gordon Prentice. The 13 day long trial in June collapsed when George Carman, counsel for the Guardian, proved it was impossible for Aitken's wife to have settled the bill at the Paris Ritz - as he had claimed on oath - because she was in Switzerland at the time.

Speaking from his constituency office in Nelson earlier today, the MP said: "It really takes some believing that a person can bring an action for libel and then drop the case leaving the general public to pick up the bill. Aitken paid £150 in court fees leaving the taxpayer to stump up over £12,600. When Parliament returns I shall be raising this with the Lord Chancellor."

In the Commons on 4 December Prentice told the Attorney General, John Morris, that the police report into Aitken's alleged perjury was long overdue. The MP wanted to know how it was possible for a team of Guardian journalists to research, write and publish The *Liar* - a book on the libel action - while nothing had emerged from Scotland Yard 6 months after the case had ended.

Note to Editors: Aitken resigned from the Cabinet to fight allegations of sleaze with *"the simple sword of truth and the trusty shield of British fair play"*. After he dropped his libel action he resigned from the Privy Council. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, Geoffrey Hoon, told the Pendle MP on 22 December: "The libel case brought by Jonathan Aitken was heard for 13 days by a High Court judge. The daily cost of hearing a high court case is £928.58, which includes the cost of the judge, administrative assistance and courtroom

accommodation. The cost of a 13 day trial is therefore £12,773.54. However, Jonathan Aitken paid £150 in court fees and therefore the total cost to public funds of this case is £12,623.54."

For Immediate Release. No 357/97 Monday, December 29 1997

NEW GUIDANCE SOON ON RADON RISK

Craven and other areas affected by the colourless, odourless but radioactive gas, radon, will soon be the subject of new guidance on how to counter the deadly menace.

New Building Regulations will ensure that new homes and not just existing ones will be built to standards which significantly reduce the likelihood of high radon levels.

Pendle MP, Gordon Prentice, whose constituency lies alongside Craven, one of the areas most affected, said: “Clearly, we need to be aware of radon and take action to protect ourselves against it - although the risks are admittedly very small. In the Craven area 330 householders have asked for a radon check and of those 29 have been found to be above the Government's recommended "Action Level".”

Note to Editors: The risk of Radon in Pendle homes at levels where it could pose a threat to health is slight. Data released by the previous Government in May 1996 showed 4,900 dwellings or 13% of all Pendle’s homes had a small probability (between 1%-3%) of being above the Government’s action level where remedial work on the building is recommended.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas which is a product of the radioactive decay of uranium. It is found in small quantities in all rocks and soils. The gas disperses quickly in the open air, but can accumulate in buildings, especially in areas where the underlying ground contains more uranium than average and is permeable. Radon is a cause for concern because exposure to the gas over time increases the risk of lung cancer, particularly among smokers. In Pendle the chance of houses being above the Government set Action Level is small (between 1% and 3%). Next door, in Craven, the number of homes affected is significantly higher. In Craven 12,100 of all dwellings (52%) have a 1%-3% probability of being above the Action Level. A further 4,400 properties (19%) have a probability of between 3%

and 10% of being above the level and 200 homes (1%) have a probability of between 10% and 30% of being over the Action Level.

more follows

NEW GUIDANCE SOON ON RADON RISK

Note 2 to Editor: Environment Minister, Angela Eagle, told the Pendle MP on 22 December: "Within the area covered by Craven District Council, 330 householders have applied to have a measurement under the Government's radon measurement programme and of those 29 have been found to be above the recommended "Action Level".

There is no obligation on householders to inform the Government when they have carried out radon remedial works. My department does not, therefore, hold statistics concerning the number of owners of existing dwellings who have taken radon remedial action in any given area. However, research indicates that between 11% and 18% of householders in England as a whole, who have homes above the radon Action Level, have so far taken some remedial action.

Building Regulations are used to address potential radon problems in new dwellings. New guidance has been drafted to take into account areas newly-identified in May 1996 as being affected by elevated radon levels. The draft guidance sets out both the areas where protective measures to prevent radon entering should apply, and also what those measures should be. It was subject to a public consultation which ended in May 1997. The guidance will be issued shortly. Although there are currently no formal requirements to apply radon protective measures to new dwellings in Craven we are aware that they are being adopted on a voluntary basis."

For Immediate Release. No 358/97 Tues 30 December 1997

LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS GET ANOTHER £1.5m TO BOOST LITERACY

Grants amounting to £1,525,724 will be coming to Lancashire next year as part of the Government's drive to improve literacy. The cash boost has been welcomed by local MP, Gordon Prentice.

Speaking from his constituency office earlier today, the MP said: "Reading and writing are the foundation skills everyone must acquire. Raising standards takes time, effort and money."

"Already £353m has been awarded to local education authorities in grants from the Standards Fund and more cash will be allocated over the next two months to bring the total to £505m. Included in this total is £59m to fund our drive to raise standards in literacy."

Note to Editors: The £59m breaks down as follows:

(a) £49m to meet the Government's national target for 2002 that 80% of 11 year olds will reach the standard expected of their age. This will be delivered through: a dedicated hour for literacy in be introduced in autumn 1998; recruiting literacy consultants in every LEA area; essential training for primary school heads, teachers and governors; and provision (within the total) of £19m for the purchase of books.

(b) £3.3m for LEAs and schools in raising literacy standards in Year 7 (secondary schools) to help address the possibility of fall back in pupils' progress when transferring from primary to secondary school.

(c) £4m for Family Literacy to raise the standard of language and literacy amongst parents and their children to tackle the cycle of under-achievement

(d) £3m to motivate young people who are under achieving or at risk of doing so, including raising their standards of literacy, through the establishment of study support centres at or near to FA premier League Clubs.

Here it is Peter. The wonders of the new technology!!

PA 5 Jun 97 18:07 BST S5518

PRESCOTT SIGNALS GREEN TAXES

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott pledged today to put "green" issues at the heart of Government, signalling possible new taxes on motorists and industry to spur the

crusade.

Mr Prescott, who heads a powerful super-ministry covering transport, environment and the regions, declared his determination to establish an "effective, efficient, clean, safe and integrated" public transport system.

In his first keynote speech on the environment since taking office, he confirmed plans for a fundamental review of transport policy, which would be set out in a White Paper next spring.

He warned the Government would not shirk from unpopular decisions to cut private car usage, and he did not rule out the possibility of higher taxes on petrol and on "gas-guzzling" cars.

He also signalled that the Government planned to impose "green" taxes on industry to encourage anti-pollution action.

Mr Prescott underlined his personal commitment to the cause by arriving to deliver his speech at the Royal Geographical Society in London by Tube, eschewing Prime Minister Tony Blair's red Jaguar which he can use for ministerial duties.

One environmental group said Mr Prescott's speech, to mark World Environment Day, had made been one of the "greenest" ever heard from a British political leader - but warned mere words would not be enough.

Mr Prescott acknowledged the challenges ahead, but said he was determined to seek solutions which combined social and environmental improvements with the promotion of economic growth, employment and regional competitiveness.

"The environment is not about one day, or one event. I want care for the environment to be at the heart of all the Government's policies, every day of the year," he said.

"I want that concern to be shared by all our people, businesses and public bodies."

Mr Prescott said his planned policy paper would be the first comprehensive integrated transport White Paper for two decades.

Transport Minister Gavin Strang will lead a team of Transport and Environment Ministers to examine key areas of transport and its impact on the environment and the economy in a series of reviews to be announced in the coming weeks.

There had been for too long an "uncoordinated" approach to providing transport infrastructure and services, said the Deputy Prime Minister.

"Transport decisions need to be integrated with the wider planning system and the way we and our children aspire to live and work in the future.

"My aim is to publish a White Paper early next year which will provide a sustainable framework for decision-making during the remainder of this Parliament and the years beyond that.

"We should have the highest aims for our transport system.

"It should be effective, efficient, clean and safe ... provide genuine choice to meet the transport needs of all sectors of society ... enhance local, regional and national competitiveness and development - and do so while respecting the environment and taking into account the costs which transport itself imposes."

Mr Prescott said the White Paper would set interim objectives for the rest of this Parliament, against which the Government could be judged.

Earlier, on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Mr Prescott said he would be looking at a whole package of measures in order to shift the focus away from private motoring and on to greater use of public transport.

"There are unpopular decisions but we have to change direction."

He hoped that by giving public transport a higher priority, Britain could change the situation whereby it had less countries per head than most other European countries but used them more because of "inferior" public transport.

Mr Prescott would consider measures including "road rationing" to speed bus journeys by giving them a greater share of the available road space.

In his speech, Mr Prescott underlined Labour's election manifesto promise to use tax to curb pollution: "Tax is not a popular word.

"But environmental taxes can encourage industry to find cost-effective, innovative ways of reducing pollution.

"They can be particularly attractive if they provide revenue which may be used to reduce other taxes, or recycled in other ways."

He said that whatever the environmental concern, the Government had to find the best way of dealing with it and ensure "that the polluter bears the cost of measures required".

Mr Prescott said regulation was often the right move to ensure consistent standards but voluntary agreement could work well in the right circumstances.

He said the Government would also develop a "more strategic overview" of the use of chemicals in the environment, and that it would consult industry over the way forward.

He also said Britain would press other industrialised countries to follow the UK's lead in meeting targets to avert global warming, and would press for agreement to the EU's initiative to improve water and sanitation quality in developing countries and to coordinate better action to control ocean pollution and preserve fish stocks.

He warned that change could not happen overnight, or even, in some cases, in the next five years. But: "I hope we will have the

satisfaction of knowing that future generations can look back and say 'Thanks for what you did'."

Former Tory Environment Secretary John Gummer, also addressing the conference, said he welcomed Labour's pledge to cut greenhouse gases by 20% of 1990 levels by the year 2010 "whether they believe it or not".

But he questioned Labour's plans to meet the target, and called on the Government to set out the cost of anti-pollution measures.

"When we do that we become a world leader. If we don't we merely become a world poseur."

Mr Gummer said he had tabled a series of questions in the House of Commons demanding that the Government spell out the measures it planned.

"I am very worried over the willingness to make great promises without the delivery mechanisms simply because it turns other people on."

Later, he told the BBC: "If you're going to cut emissions in order to stop the change in the climate then you really can't start by reducing VAT on fuel and saying that you may well spread the non-fossil fuel help to coal."

However, Mr Prescott rejected the claim that cutting VAT on fuel would encourage more use of gas and coal, telling reports that if more people left their cars at home and travelled by bus or train, the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from cars would more than compensate from any increase of fuel burning by low income families.

Tony Juniper, of Friends of the Earth, said Mr Prescott's speech was "one of the greenest speeches we have heard from a British political leader.

"But then again speeches are easy, as Margaret Thatcher found out in 1988 when she had her green conversion.

"These things need to be backed up with some action and the opportunity for that is the Budget. We want to see some green taxes - he said they were coming, now we want him to deliver."

David Worskett, RAC Director of Public Affairs, said: "The RAC welcomes the announcement that the Government is to have a strategic policy which will at last solve some of the congestion problems we are facing and will put in place a modern integrated transport system for the next century.

"The RAC is pleased that the Government is now taking such an active role."

The Freight Transport Association said it welcomed the idea of green taxes if they could be used creatively to encourage investment in cleaner technology.

"This process was started in the November Budget last year and we hope that Mr Prescott will continue this potentially successful scheme," said a spokesman.

Meanwhile 30 green lobby groups stepped up pressure on the Government to take an international lead on the environment by publishing a list of 150 recommendations for action.

Director of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, Fiona Reynolds, and Director of the Green Alliance Stephen Tindale said in a joint statement that the Government had a chance "to show it means what it says - to put its own house in order and commit the UK to a leading role internationally.

Liberal Democrat environment spokesman Matthew Taylor said: "While we welcome John Prescott's apparent conversion to supporting the green agenda, his rhetoric is so much cloud-cuckoo-land without real policies for real action."

He called for national targets to reduce traffic, and for green tax reforms in the Budget.

"This should start with company car taxation, which at the moment encourages the excessive use of private cars.

"It could also immediately reduce VAT on energy-saving materials to the same level as fuel.

"These measures could be announced before the summer and would send a clear message that the government is serious about the environment."

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